THE BUSINESS, TECHNOLOGY & ART OF ANIMATION AND VFX

September 2008

ANIMATION MAGAZINE™

Special 3-D issue

The Real Buzz on Fly Me to the Moon

+

SIGGRAPH's Summer Sizzlers

Reach Out and Touch the 3-D Toons

The Mummy Triples the Fun

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Colors You've Only Imagined

The new HP DreamColor LP2480zx Display Economically Masters the Power of Accurate Color

HP DreamColor

While DreamWorks animators were busy turning out one animated feature after another — including blockbusters like "Bee Movie" and the "Shrek" series—their Animation Technology Team was busy trying to head-off a looming crisis that threatened to slow down production.

Unless they wanted to shell out $25,000 or more for a color-critical LCD flat panel display for each of their more than 400 artists, DreamWorks had no viable alternatives to CRTs — the 100 year old technology was still the only cost-effective way to display colors accurately and consistently throughout their CG animation pipeline. Lower-cost desktop LCD flat-panels simply couldn't represent colors accurately, predictably or consistently — especially in the dark levels.

So the DreamWorks AT team stockpiled CRT monitors and warehoused them for future use. But DreamWorks was facing the prospect of time-consuming production bottlenecks as CRT supplies dwindled, or skyrocketing capital costs if they bought five-figure color-critical LCD flat panels — neither of which was an acceptable outcome.

Seeking Accurate, Affordable Color

So in early 2007, CEO Jeffrey Katzenberg and DreamWorks Animation CTO Ed Leonard sat down with executives at HP and described their dilemma in the hopes that a breakthrough solution could be found before time and options ran out. HP was a natural place to turn since DreamWorks Animation — which relies on more than 400 HP Workstations in its moviemaking — was already in a collaborative technology partnership with HP and served as a test bed for many HP solutions.

"Being able to use color to accentuate and impact viewers' emotions and drive story points is an important part of making animated films," said Leonard. "With the industry's shift from CRT monitors to LCD flat panel displays, a new level of quality and consistency needed to be achieved."

"Being able to use color to accentuate and impact viewers' emotions and drive story points is an important part of making animated films."

This collaboration evolved into an arrangement called the HP DreamColor Technology initiative. In June 2008, HP introduced the new HP DreamColor LP2480zx Display — the world's first affordable 24-inch diagonal LCD flat-panel display for accurate 30-bit, billion-color display at a 1000:1 contrast ratio. The display features a 30-bit LCD panel, tri-color (red-green-blue) LED backlight, white point adjustment without image degradation, cinema black and luminance levels and DreamColor Engine technologies for repeatable color performance on Windows, Mac, and Linux.

The HP DreamColor display is also unique in that it adheres to industry standard color spaces, such as Adobe RGB, sRGB, Rec. 709, Rec. 601, and industry-first DCI-P3 emulation desktop display, all of which are regularly used in the graphics arts, prepress, and printing applications. This means that customers can control color nuances such as gamut, gamma, white-point, black levels, and luminance.

"The HP DreamColor display shakes up the economics of digital content creation"

Precise, Predictable, Painless Color for All

"The HP DreamColor display shakes up the economics of digital content creation by putting the cost of accurate, consistent color display within reach of large

facilities, such as DreamWorks Animation, as well as small to mid-sized companies of graphics designers, game developers, editors, effects artists, and other digital content creation professionals," said Jim Zafarana, Vice President of HP Worldwide Workstation Marketing. "At $3,499*, we're democratizing this technology and making it accessible to a wider range of media creation professionals."

"This display will give you significant savings of both time and money," said Mark Lewis, owner of Studio 121 in Loveland, Colorado, a small production facility that specializes in providing digital photography and prepress services for commercial photographers, graphics designers, and artists. "If you're working on color sensitive digital imagery, like a soda can or product packaging, you'll be able to get the correct color faster than you would by guessing on an old style monitor, or by constantly stopping to do color checks."

"With the DreamColor monitor, I'm now able to see the full range of colors in the Adobe RGB color space as never before, and producing much faster," said Lewis. "And what I see on my monitor, I know I'm going to see on my prints."

Boosting Accuracy and Productivity

The accurate yet affordable color-critical DreamColor LCD display can also save considerable time that used to be spent calibrating CRTs, compulsively checking and double-checking colors, redoing prototypes, and repeating proof cycles.

> "This new HP DreamColor flat-panel display is going to allow us to expand the range of color we can view at the desktop to encompass the full gamut of what we see every day in theaters."

An optional HP DreamColor Advanced Profiling Solution (APS) kit is available for calibrating and profiling the HP DreamColor LP2480zx display from one device to another, as well as for validating and optimizing International Color Consortium (ICC) profiles. In this way, geographically dispersed facilities and their clients can be assured of seeing the exact same colors regardless of which HP DreamColor display they are using.

Today, DreamWorks Animation is no longer stockpiling CRT monitors or slave to rigorous recalibration schedule to correct for CRT color drift. With HP DreamColor displays now dotting its entire workflow, DreamWorks Animation is now able to maintain color fidelity throughout the production of its full-length animated features, and has implemented DreamColor in its workflow for the next major film release, "How to Train Your Dragon", slated for early 2010.

"This new HP DreamColor flat-panel display is going to allow us to expand the range of color we can view at the desktop to encompass the full gamut of what we see every day in theaters. In evaluating or modifying our movies at any stage of production, we can be confident that everyone is dealing with images displayed in the exact same color space, for better results," said DreamWorks Visual Effects Supervisor Doug Cooper. "This technology is giving us greater latitude to stay faithful to the artistic vision, and to use color in creative ways to emotionally influence the audiences."

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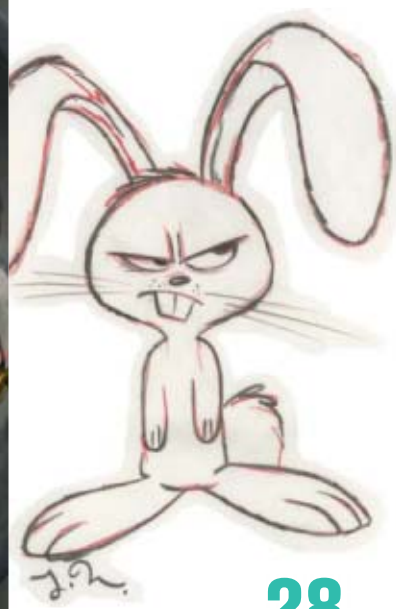

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Cover: Belgian director Ben Stassen pushes the 3-D envelope with his eye-popping movie *Fly Me to the Moon* (nWave, Summit Entertainment).

SIGGRAPH Cover: Sony Pictures Imageworks

A few days ago, the folks at Disney released the first teaser for next year's much-anticipated traditionally animated feature *The Princess and the Frog*. John Musker and Ron Clements (*The Little Mermaid, Aladdin, Hercules*) are directing the musical, which centers on a young African-American girl living in the French Quarter of New Orleans. (You can see the brief trailer at www.disney.go.com/disneypictures/princessandthefrog).

By all indications, the toon is a sweet throwback to what we've come to expect from the studio's golden revival in the 1990s. It's always a pleasure to see the talented team of Musker and Clements working their magic on the big screen. Plus, you know you're in good hands when the feature's songs are written by New Orleans native Randy Newman, who gave us all those memorable songs from Pixar movies such as *Toy Story, Monsters, Inc.* and *Cars*.

Many feel that after all those decades of lily-white heroines, it's about time the Mouse House introduced young kids to a black princess. When the story went up on our website, I was happy to read a response that said, "Thank you, Disney. Now our beautiful little African-American girls can have a Disney Princess they can relate to ... it's been way too long."

However, I was surprised when I saw all the negative reactions elsewhere on the blogosphere. On other blogs, where one sees a barrage of bitter commentaries and snide remarks day after day, posters were complaining about the design of one of the film's secondary characters. Others were whining about the choice to have the movie be a musical. Some were seeing shades of Disney's politically incorrect *Song of the South*. As a friend once put it accurately, "Some of these blogs have given a bullhorn to the most bitter, resentful and annoying people in the world. I would avoid these people in real life, so why should I read their poisonous thoughts online?" My sentiments, exactly!

The naysayers are writing the project off just by viewing a minute-long teaser. For the longest time, people were criticizing Disney for abandoning those cherished 2D animated features which included memorable songs that often nabbed an Oscar or two. Now that, thanks to John Lasseter's intelligent leadership, the studio is offering us more chances to relive the old traditional magic, the critics complain that they don't want to see "the same old, same old!"

Disney's *The Princess and the Frog*

This all reminds me of something Bill Cosby once said: "I don't know the key to success, but the key to failure is trying to please everyone!" The bitteratti can bark and whine as much as they like, but those of us who remain optimistic about the future of animation will continue to look forward to our New Orleans princess. Musker and Clements, let the good times roll, indeed!

Ramin Zahed
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"Quote of the Month"

"According to the rules of the [crustacean] species, if Dr. Zoidberg were to have sex, he'd die. What we're saying is: Love can kill you. Read comic books!"

—Matt Groening at the *Futurama* panel at last month's Comic-Con

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The Animation Planner

September

Aug. 15-Sep. 15

There's still time to catch the **LOOP 2008** animation and games festival exhib in Bogotá, Colombia, featuring first-time displays of original Colombian animation art and production pieces (www.loop.la/2008).

Aug. 29-Sep. 1

The **Moondance Int'l Film Festival** moves back to Boulder, Colorado after a two-year stint in Hollywood (www.moondancefilmfestival.com).

2

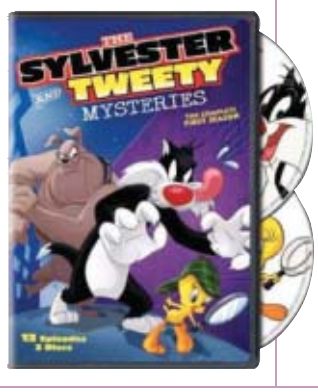
Fans of Warner Bros. Animation's stylish ***Batman Beyond*** series can grab the new DVD package which pairs its ***Return of the Joker*** and the ***Batman: Mystery of the Batwoman*** movies. Also dropping in stores today: ***Eloise's Rawther Unusual Halloween***, ***My Friends Tigger & Pooh: Hundred Acre Wood Haunt*** and ***Mickey Mouse Clubhouse: Mickey's Storybook Surprises***.

2-7

In the mood for a jolly good event? Then pack an umbrella and head over to **London's International Animation Festival** (www.liaf.org.uk).

9

The new animated ***Barbie and the Diamond Castle*** DVD will be calling out to its young girl fans everywhere. Warner Bros. fans will be lining up for ***Legion of Superheroes, Vol. 3*** and ***The Sylvester & Tweety Mysteries: Complete First Season***.

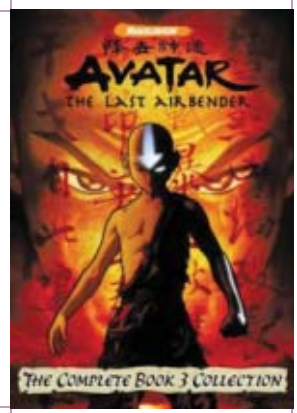


12-14

Amsterdam may be better known for its "other" tourist attractions, but this week the beautiful Dutch city hosts the **Klik! Animation Festival** (www.klickamsterdam.nl).

16

Put some Aang back into your life by getting your hands on the new ***Avatar: The Last Airbender—The Complete Book 3 Collection*** DVD. Also in stores today: ***Death Note*** (the 2006 live-action movie), ***Super Mario Bros.: Mario Spellbound*** and ***Magi-Nation: Fight the Shadows***.



16-19

European TV animation producers present their latest projects at the annual **Cartoon Forum** event which is held in Ludwigsburg, Germany this year (www.cartoon-media.be).

17-21

If you're a true animation fan, you've already booked your airline ticket for the **Ottawa Int'l Animation Festival** and **TV Animation Conference.** *Robot Chicken* creators Seth Green and Matt Senreich are keynote speakers. Tributes to Richard Williams, Michael Sporn, Jonas Odell, Japanese new wave and naughty toons are among the many highlights.

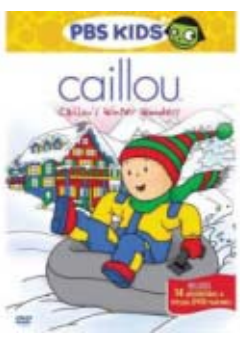
OTTAWA08 INTERNATIONAL ANIMATION FESTIVAL

18-25

Everything is cool in Austin, even when it's hotter than hell. This week the Texan city offers **Fantastic Fest 2008** at the Alamo Drafthouse Cinema (www.fantasticfest.com).

20-Oct. 11

L.A.'s Int'l Children's Film Festival screens over 100 films from around the world at the Museum of Latin American Art in Long Beach and the L.A. County Museum of Art. Kids get in for free! (www.lachildrensfilm.org).



23

You can get a head start on your holiday shopping by ordering the ***Alvin and the Chipmunks: Holiday Gift Set*** DVD. Other toon favorites out on disc today are ***Animalia: Welcome to the Kingdom***, ***Caillou's Winter Wonders*** and ***Scooby-Doo and the Goblin King***.

26-28

Yoshitaka Amano, the artist behind *Final Fantasy* and *Vampire Hunter D*, is the guest of honor at the **New York Anime Festival**, held at the Jacob Javits Center (www.nyanimefest.com).

To get your company's events and products listed in this monthly calendar, please e-mail mercedes@animationmagazine.net.

Books We Love: Midsummer Reading List

Disney Lost and Found: Exploring the Hidden Artwork from Never-Produced Animation

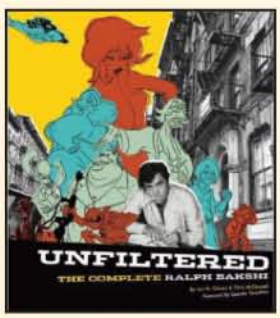
By Charles Solomon [Disney Editions, $30]

It's always a cause for celebration when animation historian (and *Animag*'s anime critic and contributing writer) Charles Solomon publishes a new book. The author, who penned the similarly themed *The Disney That Never Was* in 1995, is our knowledgeable guide on a tour of drawings, concept art and sketches created for scenes that were cut from shorts and features such as *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* and *The Rescuers*. Equally important and fascinating is Solomon's study of two Disney features that were never completed: *Wild Life*, a tale about the shallow world of fashion and celebrity in '70s era New York; and *My Peoples*, an inspired project by Barry Cook about star-crossed lovers in 1940s Appalachia. Many fans of the art form will be delighted by this fine hardcover and sigh collectively when they think of the worthy projects that were orphaned through the years at the Mouse House.

Unfiltered: The Complete Ralph Bakshi

By Jon M. Gibson and Chris McDonnell [Universe Publishing, $40]

There are many reasons for animation lovers to secure their own copy of this handsome book about Ralph Bakshi. You could be a big fan of his edgy, envelope-pushing, totally adult movies like *Fritz the Cat* (1972), *Heavy Traffic* (1973) or *Wizards* (1977). Maybe you love the work he did for Terrytoons in the '60s (*Hashimoto-san, Mighty Mouse, The Deputy Dawg Show, The Mighty Heroes*). Perhaps you were a later period fan of the rotoscoped *The Lord of the Rings* (1978), *American Pop* (1981) or *Mighty Mouse: The New Adventures* (1987-1988). Either way, this beautiful volume offers a wealth of drawings, reproductions and anecdotes about this important American artist, who truly redefined what animation could do with his dirty mind and clever artistry.



"What bothers me about animation and the heat that I took for my R- and X-rated films is why anybody would spend their whole lives doing the same thing over and over again; how artists don't grow; how if you're a cartoonist you have to continue to grow, to evolve," he is quoted in the book. As Quentin Tarantino writes in the forward, Bakshi was that rare artist with zero timidity who challenged his audiences' sensibilities every step of the way. All of that and he sure knew how to create lasting magic by drawing a few expressive lines on a piece of paper.

The Dark Knight: Featuring Production Art and Full Shooting Script

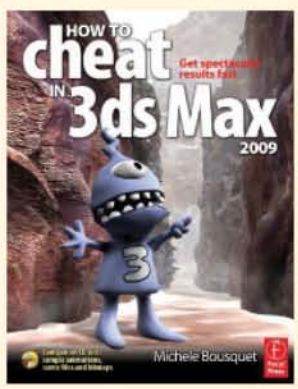
By Craig Byrne [Universe, $35]

There are few moviegoers who won't be blown away by the visual splendors of Chris Nolan's summer blockbuster, *The Dark Knight*. After seeing the movie in IMAX theaters and reading every review and catching numerous interviews with Nolan and actor Christian Bale, they'll be wise to pick up this great collection of production art and sketches. Highlighting the amazing work of production designer Nathan Crowley and all the talented DC Comics artists who can sketch the Caped Crusader in their sleep, this volume will certainly keep your imagination in flight long after this summer is a lost memory.

How to Cheat in 3ds Max 2009

By Michele Bousquet [Focal Press, $39.95]

In the intro to her extremely user-friendly primer, author Michele Bousquet promises that she'll teach readers shortcuts to make the widely used CG animation tool 3ds Max do amazing things without having to learn it all from scratch. And she sticks to her words. The 216-page handbook, which also comes with a nifty CD of starter scenes and maps and final products and animations, is just what the digital doctor ordered. Assuming that the reader has a basic grasp of 3ds Max, she covers a variety of topics and situations—taking us from modeling, materials and mapping to lighting, shadows, reflections, glass, character animation, rendering and even logo treatment and parameter wiring. Each subtopic digs deeper into the applications for the software. Even more impressive is the way Bousquet is able to break down and illustrate complex processes for designers and animators hungry for practical tips and detailed work-throughs. It kind of makes us wish the author could be our guide in all the other aspects of life on Earth! ■



—Ramin Zahed

Touched by Totoro

It would be hard to find a true animation lover who doesn't admire Hayao Miyazaki's 1988 masterpiece ***My Neighbor Totoro***. This summer, the classic has inspired a charity auction and exhibition event launched to preserve Sayama Forest in Japan, which is also known as "Totoro Forest." Located in the outskirts of Tokyo, this 8,750-acre park has been the source of inspiration and a sacred place for the Japanese animation master. Sadly, like many other natural parks around the world, the forest has been the victim of urban development in the past few decades.

Artists from around the world were asked to come up with artwork inspired by the gentle creature depicted in the landmark movie. Over 200 original pieces from internationally acclaimed artists and animators—William Joyce, Andreas Deja, Timothy Lamb, Ronnie del Carmen, Ralph Eggleston, Pete Docter and Peter de Sève, to name a few—are featured in this one-of-a-kind event which tries to answer the question "What is your Totoro?" The auction will be held at Pixar Animation Studio on September 6. A companion art book, edited by Karen Paik (*The Story of Pixar*), will also be available at the event. Selected artwork from the Totoro auction will be featured as two special exhibitions at The Cartoon Art Museum in San Francisco (Exhibit A: Sept. 26-Dec. 7; Exhibit B: Nov. 6-Feb. 20).

You can view some the awe-inspiring "What is your Totoro?" artwork and donate to the cause at www.totoroforestproject.org.

A Big Movie for Marvin

It took him 60 years, but **Marvin the Martian** is finally getting his own movie. Warner Bros. announced recently that the famous *Looney Tunes* character will be starring in a new feature that will mix CG animation and live action. Created by animation legend Chuck Jones, Marvin was first introduced in the 1948 cartoon short *Haredevil Hare* and commonly appeared opposite Bugs Bunny and Daffy Duck. The new movie, which will be produced by Alcon's Broderick Johnson and Andrew Kosove and former Warner Bros. exec Steve Crystal, is described as a family holiday story that has Marvin travel to Earth to ruin Christmas, only to be packed up in a gift box and become part of the holiday festivities. Originally voiced by Mel Blanc, Marvin has been played by Joe Alaskey in recent years (Cartoon Network's *Duck Dodgers* and the 2007 DVD special *Bah Humduck! A Looney Tunes Christmas*). With the phenomenal success of *WALL•E* at the box office, it's not surprising that Warner Bros. is putting its resourceful Martian in orbit again. Let's just hope that they give the little green guy an adventure worthy of his legendary origins. ■

2D • 3D • Shorts

Get Behind the scenes

Walt Disney Animation Studios

Be a part of the magic at

THE PRINCESS AND THE FROG

BOLT

GLAGO'S GUEST

Please visit www.disneyanimation.com for more information

Walt Disney Animation Studios

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Experience the art of our filmmaking, technology and upcoming student programs through our traditional hand-drawn and CG animation artists, engineers and crew!

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From Box Office to Xbox

Blockbusters get thumbs up and mashing buttons this summer. by Ryan Ball

When a good many of us were young, getting interactive with our favorite summer movies was limited to playing with action figures or safety-pinning towels around our necks and engaging in a little role play with friends. Today, advanced game engines and sophisticated computer graphics allow fans to jump right into cinematic worlds and become the hero, whether it be a tiny robot with a big heart, a Kung Fu-fighting panda, a hulking superhero or a cigar-chomping, fire-engine red demon from hell who fights for the good guys. As the summer comes to a close, we're looking back at some of the most intriguing games based on the animated and vfx-driven flicks that fired up the box office.

WALL•E

Though video game graphics haven't quite caught up to the master artists at Pixar, the *WALL•E* video game won over critics and fans by revisiting some of the movie's most thrilling moments while introducing new storylines and other fresh elements. The title has players take control of the intrepid robot and his mechanical love interest, EVE, as they undertake intense missions set in a futuristic world. Helping to add authenticity to the experience are voice actors from the movie, including Jeff Garlin (*Curb Your Enthusiasm*) and Academy Award-winning sound designer Ben Burtt, who created the voice of WALL•E and his automated pals.

WALL•E is rated E for everyone and is available in stores now. Learn more about this intergalactic interactive experience at www.wallevideogame.com.

Published by THQ for Wii, Xbox 360 and PlayStation 3 ($49.99), PlayStation 2 ($39.99), PSP and Nintendo DS ($29.99), Windows and Mac ($19.99) and mobile devices
Console Developer: THQ's Heavy Iron Studios

Kung Fu Panda

DreamWorks Animation's latest big-screen adventure is a mega-hit that's tailor-made for the interactive realm. Featuring slap-stick comedy and high-flying martial arts action, the game casts players in the role of Po the panda (voiced by Jack Black in the film) as he strives to be like his two-fisted heroes and save the world from a formidable foe who uses his Kung Fu knowledge for evil. Gamers can deliver diverse combo attacks against a variety of enemies, navigate multi-tiered environments and execute the comically powerful "Panda Stumble" and "Panda Quake" maneuvers.

The epic adventure puts players through 13 levels inspired by the movie, which grossed roughly $360 million worldwide. Players must master the specialized fighting styles of Po, teacher Shifu and legendary Kung Fu masters the Furious Five to become the Dragon Warrior and finally defeat Tai Lung. Adding to the fun are unique co-op and competitive multiplayer modes, collectibles and a host of character upgrades.

Like the movie, the game will entertain players of all ages, but it's mostly targeted to the tykes—at least those old enough to handle the cartoon violence that naturally comes with a title involving Kung Fu and furry animals. Lear more at www.KungFuPandaGame.com.

Published by Activision for Xbox 360, Wii and PlayStation3 ($49.99), PlayStation2 ($39.99), Windows ($19.99) and Nintendo DS ($29.99)
Console Developer: Luxoflux (PS3, Xbox), XPEC (Wii, PS3)

The Incredible Hulk

Since our coverage of the *Iron Man* game a couple months ago, SEGA has unleashed another Marvel Comics staple. Of all the superheroes out there, The Hulk is one of the most fun to play because he's mostly about smashing things. The third-person action game lets players safely exercise their destructive tendencies as they rove the streets of New York City, demolishing anything in their path including lampposts, passing cars, gigantic enemies and even buildings.

Stars Edward Norton, Liv Tyler, Tim Roth, Tim Blake Nelson and William Hurt all returned to reprise their roles from Universal's hit feature film. They help recreate key moments from the film, as well as additional plotlines and characters from the Hulk comic-book universe.

Look for more collaborations from Marvel and SEGA. The companies are also expected to join forces to create interactive fun based on the upcoming Captain America and Thor movies. Those should be a lot of fun, though we doubt they'll let you tear a car in two and use the halves for boxing gloves. Gotta love Hulk when he's angry.

Published by SEGA for Wii ($49.99), Xbox 360 and PlayStation3 ($59.99), PlayStation2 ($29.99) and Windows ($29.95)
Console Developer: Edge of Reality

Hellboy: The Science of Evil

Released in time to capitalize on the release of the big-screen sequel *Hellboy II: The Golden Army*, this game gives players a chance to become the crude Dark Horse comic-book character created by Mike Mignola. Brawling action, foreboding atmosphere and sardonic humor mix together as Hellboy uncovers an insane Nazi plot for world domination and must rush to defeat the crazed Herman Von Klempt before he can exert his evil will upon earth.

Those who didn't get enough smashing action from *The Incredible Hulk* can trade green for red and unleash a whole different brand of destructive power with help from the Right Hand of Doom. Strategy also plays a big part in defeating hoards of digital foes.

Gamers can also play as series staples Abe Sapien and Liz Sherman in cooperative multiplayer modes. Ron Perlman, Selma Blair and Doug Jones, who all star in the live-action movies and animated DVD features, lend their voices to the game, which also boasts creative direction from Mignola and movie director Guillermo del Toro. It's hard to not like the oddball cast of characters and the visually inventive world spawned from the mind of Mignola. Get some more at www.hellboy.com.

Published by Konami for Xbox 360 and PlayStation 3 ($59.99) and PSP ($29.99)
Console Developer: Krome Studios ■

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Be Strong. Be Bad. Be Strong Bad!

Telltale Games brings *Homestar Runner* to the Wii with *Strong Bad's Cool Game for Attractive People*. by Ryan Ball

Those not familiar with the popular animated web series *Homestar Runner* should immediately (after reading this article) head to www.homestarrunner.com to check out Mike and Matt Chapman's hilarious cartoons about a group of bizarre characters. Once you're a fan, you'll then want to play *Strong Bad's Cool Game for Attractive People*, the very first console game based on the property. Developed by Telltale Games in partnership with Videlectrix, the title was released in June, kicking off a series of five episodic WiiWare games starring Strong Bad, a masked wrestler and avid gamer who fancies himself the coolest thing since 64-bit graphics.

Designed specifically for WiiWare with easy-to-use controls and WiiConnect24 features, the installments will come out on a monthly basis. In each misadventure, the player assumes the role of Strong Bad to uncover a comedic plot through character interaction, dialogue-based puzzles and the use and abuse of inventory items. Each episode will also offer time wasters, including Strong Bad e-mails, prank phone calls and mini-games.

The Chapmans have themselves made simple Flash games for the *Homestar Runner* site, but finally having a dedicated, professional development studio involved has pushed the fun to whole new level. Dave Grossman, Telltale Games' design director, tells us that he and his colleagues felt honored to get the job since the Chapmans have historically been very selective about licensing their material.

"They're obviously not in it just to make a quick buck (though I'll be perfectly happy to help make them fabulously wealthy)," says Grossman. "It was clear even from the earliest phone conversations that we were all more or less in agreement about what kinds of things

were going to be fun to do with the characters, and also that we would enjoy working together. And Telltale's episodic approach to gaming matches well with the Chapmans' episodic approach to web cartoons, so it's a good fit all around."

The Chapman brothers were heavily involved with the development process from the beginning. They made trips to Telltale to brainstorm ideas for the various episodes, then later performed rewrites on the scripts, critiqued art and recorded their own voices.

"Those guys are awesome. Awesome," Grossman enthuses. "For one thing, they never seem to run out of interesting ideas. They also genuinely love games and have even made a few themselves, so they have an understanding of what kinds of issues we face and are interested in actively helping us address them. They're accommodating, hard working and really, really nice, so even if they're telling us something isn't working they'll be almost apologetic about it. I can hear other game developers gritting their teeth with envy right now."

Staying true to the visual style of the series posed interesting challenges for the development team as they worked to capture the Flash cartoon look in a 3D environment. This involved writing new shaders and implementing technology that tweaks how pieces of certain characters are oriented to the camera. "Mouths have been an endless source of entertainment," notes Grossman. "But, kudos to everybody in the art department, I think we've really gotten it right. It's 3D but it still feels just like *Homestar*."

Telltale is best known for its award-winning, serialized video game franchise *Sam and Max*, which plays out like an ongoing, interactive cartoon. The Strong Bad game works in a similar fashion, only with a more abstract, smack-talking comedic tone and winking allusions to both classic and modern console games.

Grossman believes gamers will really enjoy assuming the persona of Strong Bad, who is all ego and has very few filters controlling what comes out of his masked mouth. To make the experience as authentic as possible, he even sought to imbue the development team with the spirit of the diminutive, gravelly-voiced luchador.

"To help them get into character, we've insisted that the writers wear boxing gloves at all times, like Strong Bad does," Grossman explains. "Turns out that makes it really hard to type, but we've rewired some *Dance Dance Revolution* pads to act as keyboards, and now everybody's in really good shape. Every studio should do this." ■

For more details on *Strong Bad's Cool Game for Attractive People*, including a new trailer, screenshots and Strong Bad's development blog, go to www.telltalegames.com.

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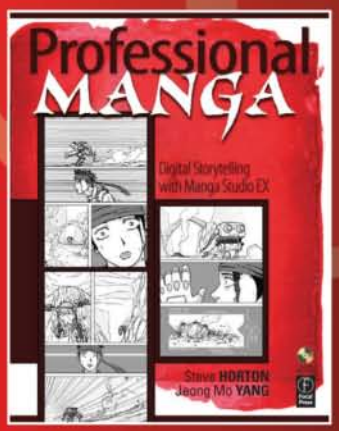

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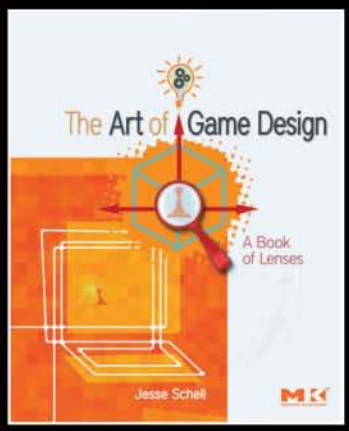

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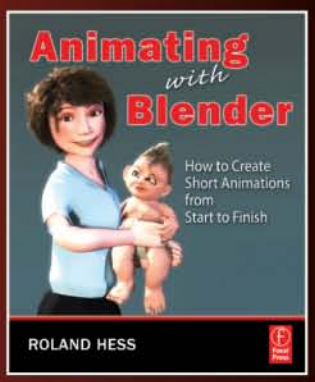

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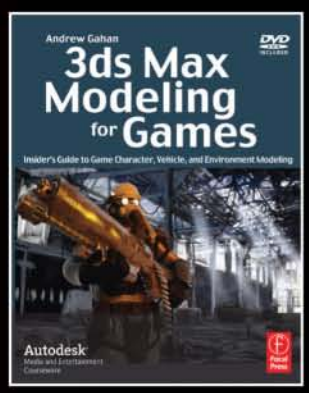

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A Giant Leap for Fly-kind in 3-D

Director Ben Stassen and writer/co-exec producer Domonic Paris give us the real buzz on *Fly Me to the Moon*. by Ryan Ball

It wasn't long ago that we were counting the casualties in the battle between 2D and 3D animation, but now even CG toons are faced with pressure to add a dimension in order to keep up with the Joneses. Stereoscopic 3-D is the latest trend, but filmmakers are no longer settling for simply rendering their standard, two-dimensional releases for 3-D projection, as we've seen with Disney's *Chicken Little* and Sony's *Open Season*. Major studios like DreamWorks Animation, which has resolved to make all of its features in 3-D starting with next year's *Monsters Vs. Aliens*, have realized that to give audiences the best possible stereoscopic experience, they have to design the films specifically for the medium. However, it's not a Hollywood juggernaut that is leading the charge, but rather an independent company in Belgium.

Brussels-based nWave Pictures, the production entity responsible for nearly one quarter of all 3-D IMAX films, teamed with Illuminata Pictures in Los Angeles to finance and produce *Fly Me to the Moon*, the first CG-animated feature film for families to be built from the ground up for 3-D exhibition. The pic is written by Domonic Paris and directed by nWave's Ben Stassen, whose credits include the special venue films *Encounter in the Third Dimension*, *Misadventures in 3D* and *Wild Safari 3D*.

Space Mates: Director Ben Stassen directs famous astronaut Buzz Aldrin in his 3-D animated feature debut.

In *Fly Me to the Moon*, three tween-aged flies decide they want to become part of the space program and hatch a plan to stow away on the 1969 Apollo II mission. With encouragement from a grandfather who missed his shot at becoming the first fly in space, the intrepid insects embark on an exhilarating, history-making space adventure. Adding to the fun is a voice cast that includes Tim Curry, Ed Begley Jr., Kelly Rippa, Christopher Lloyd, Nicollette Sheridan, Robert Patrick and '80s scream queen Adrianne Barbeau.

Stassen sees 3-D as the second revolution in the history of cinema, the first being the advent of sound

to accompany the images. The "talkies" changed the way moviegoers experienced films, but it also forced filmmakers to approach the process in a whole new way. One chief concern with making a 3-D film is making sure characters and key objects don't break frame, otherwise parts of them get cut off and it compromises the illusion. Stassen calls that 2-and-a-half-D.

"It's a very different cinematic language," Stassen says, noting that animators no longer have to keep the action moving at breakneck speeds to keep young eyes glued to the screen. "When you read the script for *Fly Me to the Moon*, the scene of the first step on the moon is Armstrong coming down from the ladder, saying his famous sentence and bouncing around. Aldrin follows, they plant the American flag, salute and that's it. The sequence lasts four minutes, which is crazy long for a predictable moment. Yet even little kids are mesmerized because, thanks to the stereoscopic filmmaking, they are physically present. They are coming down the ladder with Armstrong and they can feel the dust coming off his feet. That is the power of 3-D cinema."

With CG animation, the 3-D effect is created by moving the virtual camera slightly to the right to provide the right-eye perspective. The left- and right-eye views are then projected together to present a three-dimensional world with the aid of polarized or shuttered glasses. Stassen and his team went an extra step in creating three different levels of 3D. They placed the cameras close together to create a bugs-eye view of the world, then spaced them wider for the scenes involving humans, and wider yet for the outer space views.

"When you are in the fly environment, everything is bigger than life, and when you're human the perspective is fairly normal," Stassen explains. "Then, in space, basically we go quite extreme and separate the cameras quite a lot, otherwise we would get no 3-D whatsoever."

Stassen and his team of 60 artists in Belgium studied the grainy, black-and-white footage of the historic lunar landing, and also used original NASA diagrams to recreate elements such as the space capsule and the lunar lander down to the fine details. The dialog between the astronauts was even taken from the actual transcripts of the Apollo 11 mission, and Buzz Aldrin makes a live-action cameo as himself at the very end of the film.

Despite their resolve to represent the event with historical accuracy, the artists were forced to use a bit of creative license for some shots. For instance, they saw fit to add a star field even though stars aren't visible from the moon, and also placed mountains in the background to avoid ghosting that occurred when the white astronaut suits were contrast against the blackness of space. "Since there were no flies on the moon, we through we could fudge a few things," Paris quips.

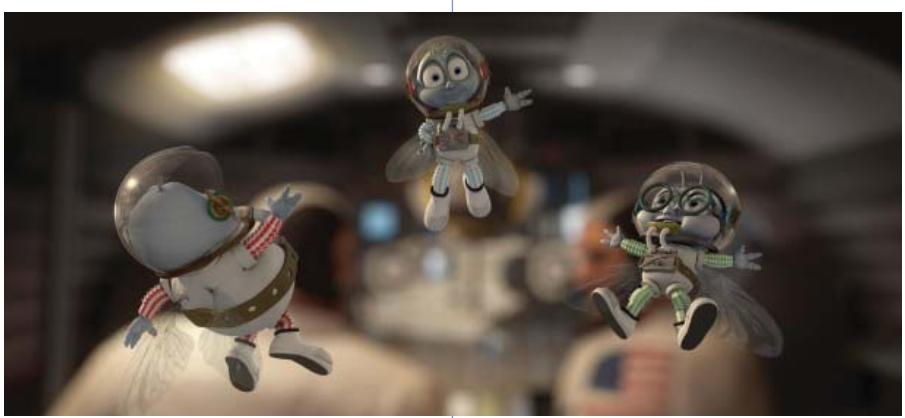
While most animated features today focus on being hip, modern and in tune with the zeitgeist, *Fly Me to the Moon* takes place long before its bread-and-butter audience was born. Still, Paris says that he never had doubts that the period piece he was writing would be embraced by children weaned on cartoons involving high-tech gadgets and current pop-culture references.

"What we did not want to do is make a movie that was too hip for the room," Paris tells us. "*Shrek* has perfected that and a lot of movies have done it, so I think that market is pretty well covered. What we wanted to do is make a movie that took an event in history that was overwhelmingly positive and, in our opinion, unified the world, and present it from the perspective of a fly on the wall, literally. I just took the actual transcripts, condensed them, and found opportunities to insert our flies."

Since *Fly Me To the Moon* is a 3-D only release, it's rolling out in roughly 1,200 to 1,300 theaters in North America this summer. The film was finished a year and a half ago, but nWave, Illuminata and distributor Summit Ent. chose to hold onto it because there were only about 800 theaters across the country equipped for digital projection at the time. Releasing an anaglyph version, where moviegoers put on glasses with red and blue lenses, would allow for wider distribution, but was not an option because it would mean an inferior, outdated 3-D viewing experience.

"If we were to release a 3-D film in the U.S. in anaglyph, I can guarantee you that James Cameron would become a crusader to crucify us, and rightly so because that would really be a step backward," Stassen remarks.

nWave and Ilumnata are going from deep space to the deep blue sea for their next 3-D animated feature. Currently in production, *Around the World in 50 Years* is the tale of sea turtles on a journey to find a passageway from the Gulf of Mexico to the Pacific Ocean. ■



"If we were to release a 3-D film in the U.S. in anaglyph, I can guarantee you that James Cameron would become a crusader to crucify us, and rightly so because that would really be a step backward."

—*Fly Me to the Moon* director Ben Stassen

***Fly Me to the Moon* hits U.S. theaters on August 15. Watch the trailer at www.flymetothemoonthemovie.com, and listen to our audio interview with Stassen and Paris at www.animationmagazine.net.**

Crafting a Career:

Six questions (and answers) about the fine art of breaking into animated prop design. by Brad Manzo

Sign sketch from *The Art of Cars* (Chronicle Books)

Although property design jobs can be hard to come by, with some ingenuity and hard work you can discover openings at your favorite animation studio. "At the moment, things are a little sparse and competition is fierce," says Chris Battle, a character designer for Nickelodeon's hit show *The Mighty B!* and prop designer for shows such as *Johnny Test*. However, there are opportunities for new artists in both TV and movies. As Battle adds, "newcomers have more varied skill sets." Additionally, whether you're experienced or a newcomer, if you can pass a studio's test, you can break in.

For the purpose of this article, I recently interviewed several prop designers to find out the keys to breaking into prop design and building a career.

Q: What kind of a background should a prop designer have?

A: Prop designers can come from different backgrounds, such as art or industrial design (designing products and cars). Regardless of background, "you should have a decent grasp of mechanics and a head full of stored visual information about common objects and their uses," notes Lance Falk, a prop designer for *Care Bears*, *Loonatics Unleashed*, *Xiaolin Showdown* and *Superman: Doomsday*.

Ben 10: Alien Force Omnitrix

Q: Are there differences in prop design for TV and movies?

A: One of the biggest differences is the schedule. "In the movies, you have a lot longer to work on the props. You can play around with a prop and be more creative. I had to slow down when I worked on a movie. TV is more of a crunch. They want quality but in a much shorter period of time than the movies," says Darrel Bowen, a prop designer for *The Simpsons Movie* and prop and character designer for series such as *Rugrats*, *X-Men*, and *Scooby-Doo*.

The other main difference is in the complexity of the props. "TV props are usually simpler due to both screen size and the shorter production schedule in television," Battle says.

Batman: Gotham Knight

© Warner Bros.

Q: How do you land a job as a prop designer on an animated TV show or movie?

A: Your portfolio is the key to landing a job. When your portfolio is ready, check with the studios. "Most studios have job boards/hotlines, and many job listings are available through local animation labor unions. (Almost all animation in Los Angeles is under contract with The Animation Guild)," Battle says.

Some studios also require that you take a test. "I've never taken a test, but a newcomer might. A few days to a week is normal for tests, but the right portfolio at the right time under the nose of the right art director or [artistic] producer will make a test unnecessary. Usually, they need someone NOW," Falk says.

However, as Battle adds, "Even if you have a resume and a portfolio of previous work, studios may still ask you to take a test."

If you do have to take a test for a TV series, "Be prepared to do quite a few drawings in a couple of days," Bowen says. This is similar to a TV production schedule.

Q: What should be in your portfolio?

A: "You have to have a wide range of styles—everything from cartoony to realis-

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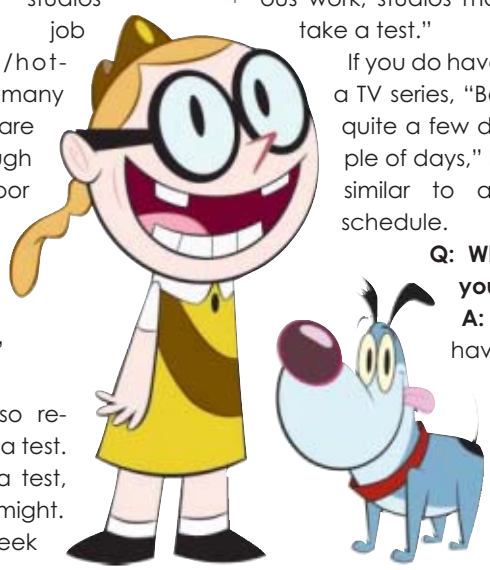

The Mighty B! (Nickelodeon)

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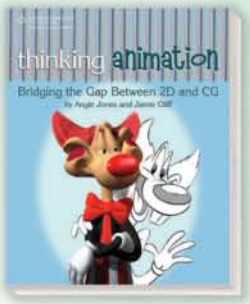

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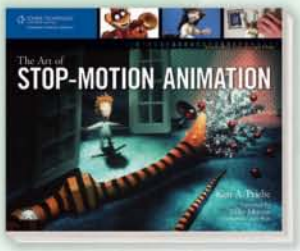

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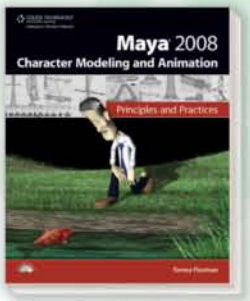

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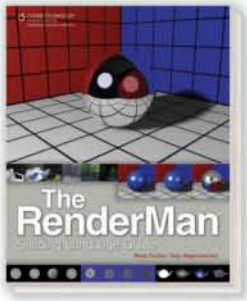

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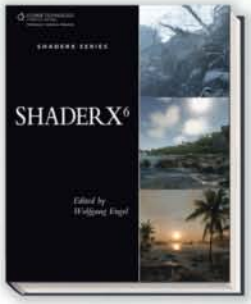

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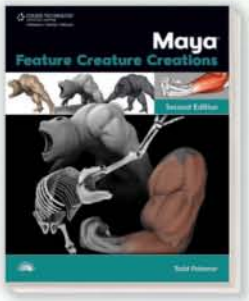

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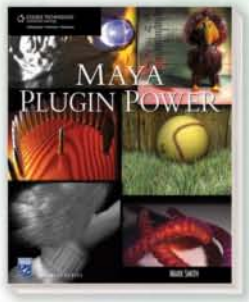

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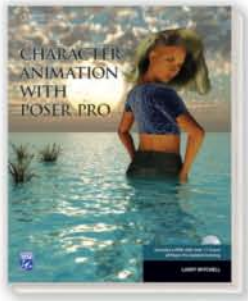

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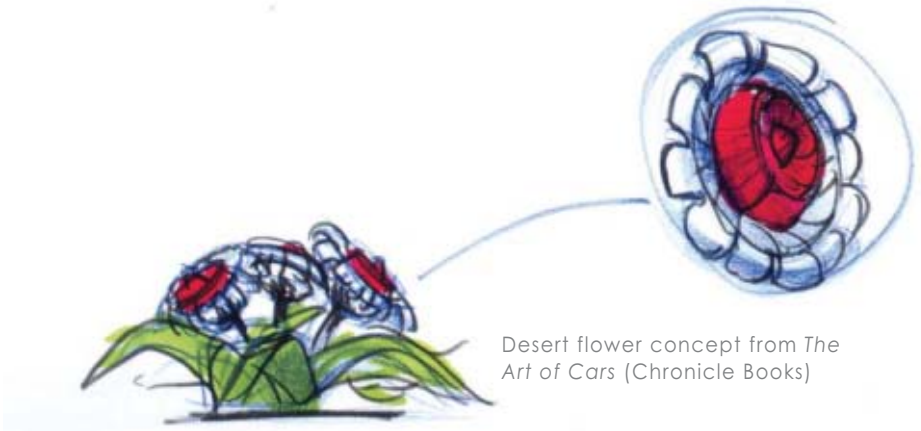

Desert flower concept from *The Art of Cars* (Chronicle Books)

Prop Design

continued from page 16

tic, almost like a video game type, to reality type style—which is really hard core—to high tech (*X-Men*, *Voltron* or *Transformers*) to the real simple stone-age props (such as rocks, twigs and clubs)," says Bowen. "I'd tailor your portfolio to be more high-end for movies."

In addition to showing range and versatility, "You should be aware of the overall style of a project/studio. Don't submit a portfolio for *The Batman* that's filled with *The Fairly OddParents*-style designs," Battle says.

You also need to show turns in your portfolio. "Demonstrating that you can consistently draw something from a number of angles is a very good idea. It shows that you think of your designs as 3-dimensional objects," Falk says.

Q: What things do you learn on the job that they do not teach you in school?

A: "I learned *everything* on the job," says Falk. "I was an art major in school, but all my practical, applied knowledge was a direct result of practicing 40 hours a week on the job."

Bowen responds, "They don't teach you about the schedule or the studio test. In school, you can take your time unless you have to take a test. They don't teach you how to act in a workforce and how to assimilate in an environment. In CalArts, they let you be yourself. In a job, you have to separate your own creative mind-set and fine art abilities and apply it to what the client or director or producer wants."

Q: What are the keys to staying in the field and building a career?

A: Be Professional. As Battle points out, "Work hard and do good work. Be social and don't be a jerk or a prima donna. Most animation communities are fairly small, and word gets out if you're good or if you're difficult to work with."

Besides working hard and being professional, "Speed, reliability, quality work and versatility are essential," Falk says.

Once you've gained some experience in prop design, you may also be able to expand what you can do in the animation field and, more importantly, keep yourself in demand and employed. Bowen says, "Prop Design is a good way to kind of cut your teeth or break into animation because it's teaching perspective and learning to draw perspective. Later on, if you desire, you can move on to character design and storyboarding." ■

Brad Manzo is a freelance journalist, award-winning humor writer, speaker and writing instructor. You can learn more about him at www.bradmanzo.com.

Prop Design Resources:

- *Teen Titans* crew member blogs (for example, Norm Ryang: www.normart.blogspot.com/2006/02/t-sub-comp-sketches.html)
- *The Batman* crew member blogs (for example, Andy Chiang: www.acvegan.blogspot.com)
- "Art of" books for feature films, such as *The Art of Cars* or *The Art of WALL•E* (Chronicle Books)
- Google Image Search
- Realistic photos
- Turbosquid.com (3D models)

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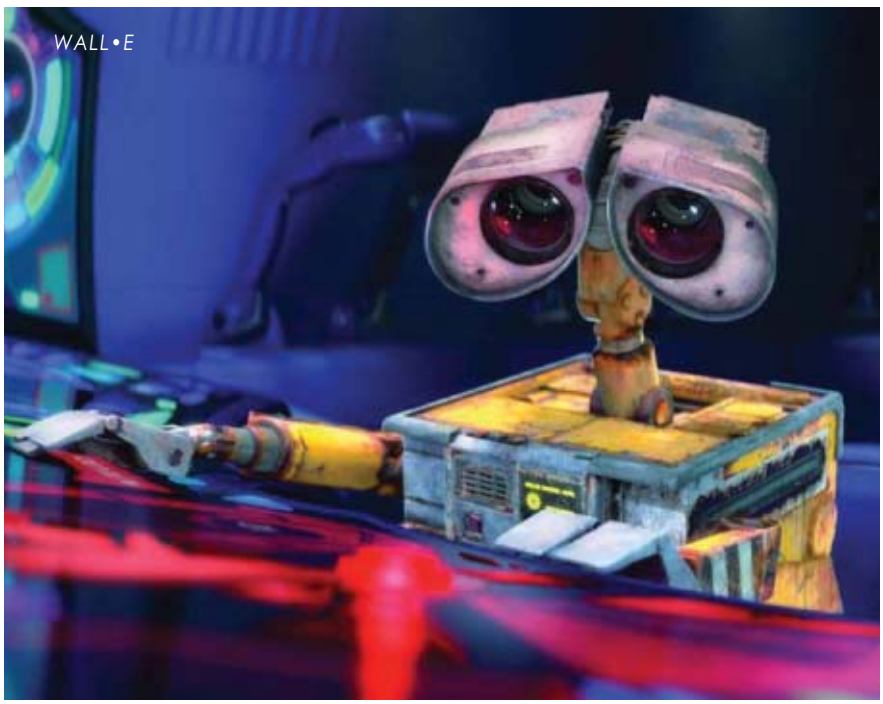
Ben 10: Alien Force Ben turn



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"Baron" master copy digital painting by Brandon Russell, 2008 © Cogswell Polytechnical College

Late-Summer Scorchers

Now on disc: TV faves and familiar feature faces.

by Mercedes Milligan

Ben 10: Season 4 [Turner, $19.98]

Those who've been collecting this ratings-blasting series by "Man of Action" (the crack squad of comic-book writers Joe Casey, Joe Kelly and Steven T. Seagle and artist/writer Duncan Rouleau) will finally be able to complete the set as this final installment hits shelves.

The two-disc set features the ultimate 10 episodes of the hugely popular Cartoon Network show. A recent online trailer announced the release will also include four versions of the *Ben 10: Secret of the Omnitrix* feature. If so, fans can look forward to sweet extras like bonus trivia and deleted scenes. While we're sad to see *Ben 10*'s home ent. career wrap up, we'll comfort ourselves with Ben's teenaged *Alien Force* adventures, the upcoming live-action feature, (and perhaps an Omnitrix toy or two).

[Release date: August 5]

The Nightmare Before Christmas (2-Disc Collector's Edition) [Disney/Touchstone, $32.99]

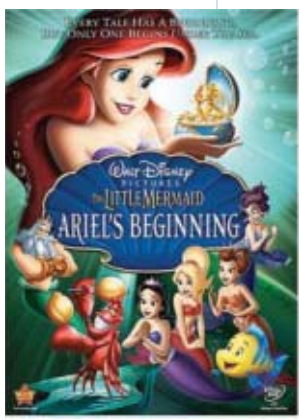
What's this, what's this? There's something in the air! And goths and toon fans everywhere are eager to pick up this beautiful re-mastered edition of Tim Burton's pan-holiday creepy classic. Jack Skellington and the fiends of Halloween Town have never looked more terrifying!

Fans will feel that their demented Christmas has come early this year, with two discs packed with special features: Audio commentary by Burton, director Henry Selick and composer Danny Elfman; bonus Burton works *Vincent* and *Frankenweenie*; a promo film about the Disneyland Haunted Mansion makeover; a bonus digital copy of the film (for all you handheld addicts); and plenty more. Now you know what to ask Sandy Claws for.

[Release date: August 26]

The Little Mermaid 3: Ariel's Beginning [Disney, $29.99]

In this heart-warming prequel set one year before the events of *The Little Mermaid*, Ariel's music-loving mother the queen is kidnapped by villainous pirates. The loss of his wife leads King Triton to ban all music from the kingdom, sending Ariel into despair until she discovers a secret undersea music club (evading her cold governess in the process). When Triton finds out and flings the groovin' outlaws in prison, Ariel must convince him that music is the heart of their kingdom.



Directed by Peggy Holmes (DVDX Award-nom for her *Mickey's Twice Upon a Christmas* script) with Jodi Benson and Samuel Wright reprising roles as Ariel and Sebastian, this sweet feature is accompanied by the *Music and More* and *Backstage Disney* (a look at the film and recent Broadway musical) featurettes, plus activities and deleted scenes. Music to our ears!

[Release date: August 26]

South Park: The Complete Eleventh Season [Comedy Central, $49.99]

Trey Parker and Matt Stone's pint-sized bad boys are back on DVD with all 14 uncut episodes from this raw as ever season on three discs. Standard bonuses (pardon our oxymorons) like commentary will be augmented by a three song *Guitar Hero* download in honor of the gamer-provoking "Guitar Queer-o" episode. *Rawk!*

Season 11 features such inspired un-PC episodes as "The Snuke" (in which Hillary Clinton experiences some … discomfort), "With Apologies to Jesse Jackson" (Randy Marsh blurts out an unfortunate epithet on *Wheel of Fortune* and is invited by the Rev. to "kiss it") and the spectacular "Imaginationland" two-parter. The hefty price has toned down on Amazon, so now is the time for starving students to indulge in this back-to-school treat.

[Release date: August 12] ■

The Samurai Critic:

Reviews of the Latest Anime Releases on DVD and Blu-ray

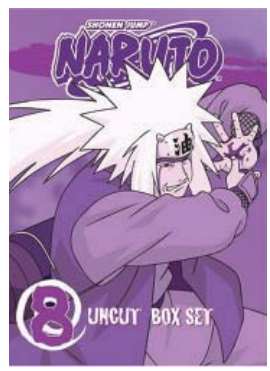
by Charles Solomon

Death Note, Vols. 4-5 [VIZ: $24.98, each]

Light Yagami may be the top student at one of Japan's best high schools, but he's bored and alienated—until he finds the Death Note, a notebook dropped into human space by Ryuk, a bored and alienated *Shinigami* (God of death). If anyone writes the name of a human in the notebook, the person dies within minutes. With this murderous new power, Light launches a grandiose vigilante campaign to rid the world of criminals and create his vision of a perfect society. The baffled police call in the reclusive and bizarre über-detective known only as L to crack the case, and the series becomes a deadly battle of wits. The duel is both professional and personal: L has never failed to solve a case, Light has never met an intellect of equal power. Light strides arrogantly across the screen like a demigod; unkempt and barefooted, L slouches in chairs and licks the icing off doughnuts. To ensure Light does nothing without his knowledge, L has them handcuffed together, like Tony Curtis and Sidney Poitier in *The Defiant Ones*.

The story grows more complicated with the appearance of another Death Note belonging to teen idol Misa, who nurtures a crush on Light. L and Light continue to clash and even punch each other out, although L fights with his twitchy bare feet. Although it began slowly, *Death Note* seems to get better with every episode. The Madhouse Studio-produced 37-episode series was created by writer Tsugumi Ohba and illustrator Takeshi Obata and first aired on NTV Japan in 2006 and on Cartoon Network's [adult swim] block in 2007.

Naruto Uncut Box Set, Vol. 8 [VIZ: $49.98]



The eighth set of the comic adventures of knuckle-headed ninja-in-training Naruto Uzumaki (episodes 93 through 106) ranks as one of the best in the hit series. A battle that pits Naruto, his instructor Jiraiya and Lady Tsunade (who will become the Fifth *Hokage*, or leader of the Village Hidden in the Leaves) against the sinister Orochimaru and his henchman Kabuto offers some unusually dynamic fight sequences. The combatants employ magical *jutsu* (ninja techniques) and summon gigantic versions of animals associated with supernatural warriors in Japanese folklore: a toad, a snail (or slug) and a serpent. This exciting if indecisive duel is juxtaposed with the farcical comedy of a visit to a hot spring. Jiraiya tries to earn his nickname of "Pervy Sage," while Naruto aids a hapless pair of bill collectors.

Most of the set focuses on the efforts of Naruto, Sasuke and Sakura to protect a runner in a high-stakes race in the Land of Tea. Naruto (adapted to TV from the comics by manga artist Masashi Kishimoto in 2002) demonstrates his growing strength not through his use of *jutsu*, but through his dedication to his friends and to fulfilling his mission. Could everyone's favorite knucklehead actually be maturing? It's a must-have set for Naruto's many fans.

One Piece—Season 1, First Voyage (Uncut) [FUNimation: $49.98]

One of anime's most popular fantasy-adventures, Eiichiro Oda's *One Piece* ran for more than 350 episodes—plus a dozen features and three specials, produced by Production I.G and Toei Animation. The choppy, heavily edited version from 4Kids (2004) left American viewers scratching their heads over what Japanese audiences saw in *One Piece*. FUNimation's uncut edition restores the show to its nutty glory—and makes it easy to understand why the series was such a hit. Monkey D. Luffy (rhymes with "goofy") is determined to make himself King of the Pirates by finding the fabulous treasure of legendary marauder Gold Roger. As Luffy recruits master swordsman Zoro and ace navigator Nami for his crew, flashbacks reveal how he acquired his trademark straw hat from the noble pirate Shanks.

Because Luffy once ate a magical "Devil Fruit," his body and limbs can stretch beyond Elasta-Girl's, to deliver staggering kicks and punches. A *bishonen* (beautiful boy), Luffy isn't: he looks like a grinning golliwog with a wide, frog-like mouth, scrawny limbs and huge feet. But his honesty, loyalty and kind heart win friends wherever he goes. Although Oda cites *Dragon Ball* as an influence, *One Piece* uses broader, cartoon-ier animation. The Straw Hat Pirates' foes—iron-jawed Captain Morgan, Captain Buggy of the Clown Pirates and Jango, the moon-walking hypnotist of the Black Cat Pirates—are as weird as the characters in an old Fleischer short. Oda says that *One Piece* is the story he wanted to read as a boy; millions of others love it. ■

Meet Sid: Scientific American, Digital Puppet

The Jim Henson Company launches *Sid the Science Kid*, a new 40-part children's show premiering on PBS KIDS next month.

He may be a Henson puppet, but unlike Kermit, Miss Piggy and the Fraggle Rock clan, the animated star of the new series *Sid the Science Kid* is digitally created. Billed as the Henson Company's first curriculum-based series, the show uses the Henson Digital Puppetry proprietary technology which allows performers to puppeteer and voice digital characters in real time. Essentially, the studio offers a virtual multi-camera environment where suit performers have tracking marks to create the motion for the characters, while the puppeteers use a set of hand controls to drive the expressiveness of the character while voicing for the camera.

"The show follows our main character, a preschooler named Sid, as he goes about experiencing his day," says Brian Henson, co-CEO of The Henson Company, who exec produces the series with sister Lisa Henson, Halle Stanford, Bradley Zweig and L.A. public station KCET's Joyce Campbell. "Each day, he faces all these questions—like why don't my shoes fit me anymore or why do bananas get brown and mushy—and answers them in many ways. Sid's teacher Susie gets to sing a song about the question, and he goes back home to his family and uses what he has learned in imaginative ways."

The Henson team has already explored the possibilities of its Digital Puppetry technology in projects such as the Yahoo! online series *The Skrumps* and the PBS KIDS Sprout preschool show *Frances*. But *Sid the Science Kid* represents the first time kids can watch the technology's application on traditional television. So how does the new show compare to puppet-animated projects of the past?

"It's hard to compare the two, but we've been able to get really great character definition out of Sid and his friends," notes Henson. "The personalities feel very real. There aren't many companies that are able to do this kind of deeper character development on TV the way Pixar does it for movies. I think the show's simplicity and bright colors make it perfect for young audiences."

Henson's proprietary technology enables animators to manipulate and puppeteer CG-animated characters in real time. "It's like a three-camera TV show," says Henson. "But we're able to get four 11 minutes of animation a day. We're shooting a lot more than we'll use in the final project, and this digital 24-frame animation enables us to go back to the speed and spontaneity of a three-camera sitcom—of course, the cameras are virtual and you can do a lot more with them."

Brian Henson

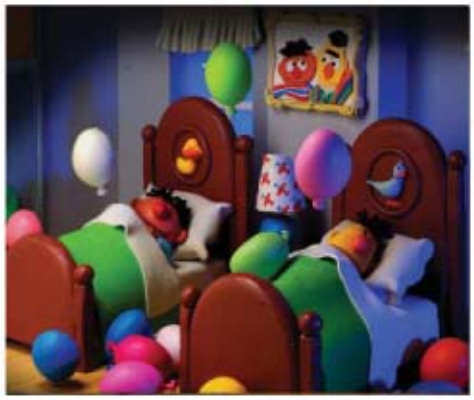
The relatively lower cost of the technology has allowed the Henson Company to stay competitive in this new arena. "What's very cool is that the price tag is very competitive with shows that are produced off-shore," says Henson. "Plus, once you make the initial investment, the price goes down 20 percent a year for us because we're getting more and more efficient. Right now, the show is expensive to make compared to other preschool series, but it's not expensive for other kids' shows and it's certainly inexpensive compared to primetime productions. Our next step is to apply the technology to a primetime animated sitcom—largely, that's what it was designed to do."

Henson uses Motion Analysis Corporation's 3D optical mo-cap hardware to capture the body movements of the actors. Then, the production goes to post, where the process of cleaning up the animation and delivering the final high-res animation takes place. "These days, I'm watching artists using these enormously sophisticated tools," says Henson. "I'm sure that in about two years, you won't even use the term 'computer animation' anymore. Things look utterly realistic or they resemble projects that were drawn by crayons on paper. What we can achieve with computers has truly become limitless."

So, will we see other familiar Henson puppets make the transition to this brave, new world? "Well, the Muppets are managed by Disney," Henson responds. "But I think puppets should stay puppets. Muppets should stay with felt and have ping pong ball eyes. That's part of the magic. New technologies should be used for new characters!" ■

***Sid the Science Kid* premieres on PBS KIDS on September 1. You can learn more about the Henson's Digital Proprietary Studio at www.henson.com or www.pbskids.org.**

Bert & Ernie's Sunny Days in Clay



A new version of *Sesame Street*'s longtime pals debuts on TV all over the world. by Ramin Zahed

When *Sesame Street* roomies-in-residence Bert and Ernie were created by Jim Henson and Frank Oz in 1969, nobody could predict that their adventures would continue to charm children and their parents for almost four decades. This month, a new claymated version of the duo will premiere on the 39th season of *Sesame Street*, and it looks like the innovative animation style is going to take their global popularity to even bigger heights.

The new project—*The Adventures of Bert and Ernie*—is animated by Misseri Studio in Florence, Italy, and consists of 26 five-minute installments. Viewers can catch our friends relating stories sparked by photos and memorabilia in their scrapbook. With help from Bert's pet pigeon, Bernice; Ernie's Rubber Duckie; never-before-seen family members; and furniture that morphs into other objects, the dynamic duo will encourage literacy, diversity and imagination through humor. Steve Whitmire and Eric Jacobson provide the voices for the new Bert and Ernie, as they do for the puppet versions of the characters.

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According to *Sesame Street*'s exec producer, Carol-Lynn Parente, it took the project two years to go from idea to final animation. It was the Italian studio that came to Sesame Workshop with recreating the buddies in clay. "Misseri Studio is well-known for producing clay, sand, water and stop-motion animation," says Parente. "When they gave us boards for another project, as a joke at the very end, they dropped in a shot of Bert and Ernie as clay figures. When we saw it, we were struck by how great the characters looked so we began seriously considering other mediums for Bert and Ernie."

Sesame Workshop brought the Misseri Studios team to New York for a mini workshop to tweak the claymation idea and ensconce the production company in the ways of Muppet characters. "Because we had been working together for a couple of years, they understood our production concerns—to maintain the essence of Bert and Ernie—and our budgeting constraints as a nonprofit," adds Parente. It was a great learning process for us both."

Moving the puppets to a new medium was a natural option for *Sesame Street*, which strives to stay innovative and experiment to keep the show vibrant and relevant. "Part of the process is learning to take risks around an established brand," explains Parente. "For years, we didn't want to animate the Muppet characters. They were like sacred cows and we didn't want to dilute the brand. Bert and Ernie especially are a classic duo and we didn't want to compromise their integrity or viewers' expectations of them. But finding the right partner was really the key to expanding into new styles of production."

Another big factor was that children are quite used to seeing their favorite characters in a variety of different formats these days, as they are represented graphically in books, in 2D animation online and with CG animation in newer projects. The puppets' human characteristics (as opposed to Cookie Monster's fur or Big Bird's feathers) also made them ideal for claymation. "By manipulating Bert's eyebrows, for example, you see the nuances of their expressions that you can't see anywhere else," says Parente. "Funny enough, they look more human in animation. Initial testing with children was *very* positive with little or no mention of them being in a different format."

Carol-Lynn Parente

Of course, the world of claymation liberates the producers to show us full-length versions of the characters, so we can see them run, jump or swing from vines. "It really expands the world that these characters can explore," notes Parente. "The only disadvantage is the time it takes to get the movements of the characters right, so that they look and feel like Bert and Ernie in this new medium."

Co-produced by Misseri Studio, German broadcasters NDR and KI.KA and U.K.'s Channel Five preschool block Milkshake, the series is being sold as a stand-alone show internationally. ABC (Australia), Cartoon Network India, DR-TV (Denmark), Disney Asia, Disney Spain, HOP (Israel), NPS/Zeppelin (Netherlands), NRK (Norway) and SVT (Sweden) have already signed on for the stand-alone show.

Like other timeless children's classics such as Mickey Mouse, Bugs Bunny and Winnie the Pooh, Bert & Ernie's appeal goes way beyond cultural, racial, class or generational barriers. "These characters are very representative of the relationship between Frank Oz and Jim Henson. Their friendship is genuine and warm and they are funny. Combine that with great writing, and you have characters that are lovable." ■

***Sesame Street's* new season begins on PBS KIDS on August 11. For more information, go to www.sesameworkshop.org or www.pbskids.org.**

New Projects Shine in the Starz Galaxy

Traditional TV shows, sophisticated CG-animated features, vfx service work and innovative shorts co-exist at the multi-tiered entity which has undergone many changes in recent years. by Ramin Zahed

To the uninitiated, it may come as a surprise that properties as diverse as Film Roman's *The Simpsons* and *King of the Hill*, this summer's Vanguard Animation's *Space Chimps* and Nick Jr.'s Flash series *Wow! Wow! Wubbzy!* all fall under the big Starz Media umbrella. The global programming production and distribution company, which includes the Film Roman, Anchor Bay Entertainment, Starz Animation Toronto and Manga Entertainment brands, has been generating a lot of new noteworthy activities in recent months.

In June, Starz announced a joint venture with gaming giant Electronic Arts to produce animated projects based on *Dead Space* and other EA franchises. Film Roman will be producing the animation and Anchor Bay will release the home entertainment products.

"We're exploring the intersection of video games and animation. *Dead Space* is an exciting PG-13 project—with elements of *Resident Evil* and *Alien*," says Scott Greenberg, CEO of Film Roman. "Our story serves as the prequel to the game. It has a very cool look—it will be 3D characters with CG backgrounds—and I think gamers are going to love it. We are also planning two new kids' series with EA aimed at six- to 11-year-olds, and we'll be announcing key broadcasters for the shows in the near future."

Greenberg says the two core businesses of production services and original animation continue to thrive side by side at the Burbank-based studio, which is working on the 20th season of FOX-TV's *The Simpsons* and the 13th season of *King of the Hill*. Film Roman also delivered the 2D animation created for the Simpsons ride which debuted at Universal Studios this summer.

Among the studio's other projects is the new Mike Judge toon *The Goode Family*, which will premiere on ABC this fall, and Orlando Jones and Ali LeRoi's Flash-animated sketch show *BUFU*, slated for BET. Also keeping the animators busy are Marvel's *Super Hero Squad* and *Hulk: The Animated Series*, projected for a 2009 airdate. "We're producing 26 half-hours for each show. These are great action genre series and the look is quite different from the other prime-time work we do," says Greenberg.

In addition to the TV projects, vfx work (the studio did effects for this summer's *Speed Racer* and *Sex and the City* movies) and commercials, Film Roman has also been working on an animated feature that has been generating a lot of interest among older fans—*The Haunted World of El Superbeasto*, based on the popular comic from Rob Zombie. Directed by Mr. Lawrence and Carey Yost, this not-for-kids movie features the voice talents of Rosario Dawson, Paul Giamatti, Tom Kenny, Cassandra Peterson, Rob Paulsen, Tom Papa and Joe Alaskey, to name a few.

"Here you have a 2D animated movie that is R-rated," says Kent Rice, CEO of Starz Animation. "It's something that we haven't really seen since Ralph Bakshi's *Fritz the Cat*. It's certainly not your typical funny, talking animal movie." The Weinstein Company is the film's disributor, but no specific dates have been announced.

Film Roman, which was founded in 1984 by Phil Roman, has seen its share of highs and lows. The company went through a rough patch between 1995 and 2000, but the acquisition by IDT Media's DPS of 51 percent of the company share in 2003 and the subsequent

Rock Monster: Film Roman has been working on The *Haunted World of El Superbeasto*, produced by Rob Zombie.

Top of His Class: The crew at Starz Animation Toronto is hard at work on 9, a feature adaptation of Shane Acker's award-winning CG short.

David Steinberg

Scott Greenberg

Kent Rice

merger with Starz Entertainment in 2006 seem to have turned things around for the Burbank-based studio. "We have over 24 years of experience producing quality animated TV series," says Greenberg. "Our two core businesses—production services and original content—are moving along very well, and I think artists are really happy here."

A Studio Grows in Toronto

In addition to the Burbank center, Starz launched a state-of-the-art CG facility in Toronto last September. Stars Animation Toronto is a 45,000-square-foot studio whose first prestige project is Focus Feature's fantasy epic 9, produced by Tim Burton. The eagerly anticipated project is directed by Shane Acker, based on his own award-winning 2005 short about a strange post-apocalyptic world inhabited by sock-puppet-like creatures. The impressive voice cast includes Elijah Wood, John C. Reilly, Jennifer Connelly, Martin Landau and Christopher Plummer.

According to David Steinberg, the studio's general manager, the Toronto shop is working on two other animated features. "The work we're doing here is akin to the big studio work on the West Coast, but we do it at a different price point," he notes. "A lot of the top artists are coming here because we have this great new space, and it's smaller, homier and a less-encumbered facility."

Steinberg, who worked as director of production for Disney and was assistant director on *The Land Before Time, An American Tale* and writer on *All Dogs Go to Heaven* and *Rock-A-Doodle,* is proud of the studio's development program for its own proprietary features and a healthy slate of shorts pitched by the studio's own artists. "Our feature bids are anywhere between 10 to 14 percent of the big studio CG-animated movies," he adds. "Our secret weapons are the tax grants provided by the Canadian government. Plus, we have excellent local resources and a great relationship with Sheridan College. There's not a lot of feature work being done here, so there's a driven, hungry and efficient crew that wants to put our studio on the map."

In the Film Roman Family: From top, among the many productions Film Roman is working on this year is ABC's fall series *The Goode Family*, Nick Jr.'s *Wow! Wow! Wubbzy!* and animated projects based on EA's *Dead Space* games.

Rice, who has been the CEO of Starz Animation for two years, says this past summer has been a very busy one for the company as they were gearing up for the July 18 release of *Space Chimps.* "I've been keeping my fingers crossed for that project for so long I have arthritis now," he jokes. "But seriously, I think we actually have a great release window. John Williams and his team at Vanguard did a terrific job of delivering the film, which didn't have a huge production budget. This summer, *WALL•E* has done quite well, and there's not another family-focused movie coming out that targets the five- to 11-year-old audience, so we're pleased with that."

Rice points out that both the Toronto studio and the Film Roman operation are branching out to explore different forms of animation and creating short form projects as well as producing branded entertainment properties for commercial clients. He says, "We haven't figured out exactly what works, but it's dangerous to assume that one model works and do that for two or three years. As we have all seen, audience appetites change very quickly these days."

With projects as eclectic as *Wow! Wow! Wubbzy!, Dead Space, 9* and *El Superbeasto,* Starz seems to be casting a wide net to have something for all those changing appetites. "I like to say that there are many stars in the Starz sky and not one shines brighter than others," notes Rice. "We inherited a lot of things, and we're open to learning what will succeed. And it's important to realize that Pixar isn't the only model for success." ■

The Padded Cel

by Robby London

Cartoon Celebs Line Up Behind the Candidates

Can you feel the buzz? America's "grand experiment" in democracy is once again on proud display to the world as we exercise our most cherished and sacred right as citizens. Candidates revel in the privileges and freedoms for which our ancestors gave their lives—and which the founding fathers memorialized in the Constitution.

That's right. We refer to special-interest pandering, flip-flopping and slimy attack ads—otherwise known as the Presidential Election.

As always, high-profile Hollywood heavyweights are declaring their support of either McCain or Obama. (Except for Paris Hilton who has formally endorsed "that dude who was president in *Independence Day*.") Animation stars are no different. Here is a quick survey of the presidential preferences of some of the most influential celebrities in Toontown.

Illustration by Mercedes Milligan

Scooby Doo: Obama. Scooby has uncovered a nefarious plot in which a lookalike has taken the place of the real John McCain, who died 17 years ago at the age of 87. Hell, even *we* could spot that fake rubber *Mission Impossible* mask! But please, *anyone* but Tom Cruise underneath…

Fat Albert: He supports Obama, since they have one very obvious trait in common: They are both Muslims.

Cast of *Cars*: They favor McCain. They have a deep-rooted fear that Obama's energy conservation and public transportation advocacy will merely *start* with forced hybridization—but that his secret agenda is outright genocide. The wrecking yards and compactors could be working overtime…

He-Man: Ever since he came out of the closet (he actually lifted the door right off its hinges), He-Man has voted strictly Democratic. He's still smarting over McCain's "Straight-Talk" Express from 2004. He-Man insists that even Skeletor is more compassionate than McCain. ("Richard Simmons for Veep!")

Invader ZIM: Fed up with the restrictive and unwelcoming immigration policies of the Bush administration, ZIM's counting on things to loosen up a little bit under an Obama presidency—so he can finally clear customs.

Homer Simpson: McCain is in favor of nuclear power. Obama is opposed. Homer works in a reactor. He's no dummy. He knows where his "butt is breaded!"

SpongeBob: Bikini Bottom is the only 100 percent "blue" district in the country. Moreover, McCain advocates offshore drilling and Obama doesn't. Bikini Bottom is in grave jeopardy! SpongeBob is being dispatched to the Republican Convention—as an Obama spy! He'll go undercover cleaning up after binge-drinking Young Republicans.

Optimus Prime: It's a one-issue election for Opti. Gas prices are KILLING him. McCain's proposal to rescind gas taxes is all he needed to hear. Special note: Insiders report that Prime is being actively wooed by the cast of *Cars* (see above) as their candidate for a 2012 run on an all Fossil Fuel ticket.

Eric Cartman: McCain. Figures a McCain administration will be more likely to kill more people from other cultures. He's counting on McCain to finally take revenge on Hanoi Hilton "gooks" and "kick some Vietnamass."(Columnist's note: please don't write us, we are only quoting Cartman.)

Elmer Fudd: Waiting for the NRA to endorse a candidate. Hoping it's McCain so he won't have to pronounce "Barack."

Padded Cel Columnist: Still trying to get past bitterness resulting from being rejected as Obama speechwriter after submitting columns as writing samples. (But enjoyed chatting with Secret Service.) ■

Longtime *Animation Magazine* columnist Robby London claims that he was the first person to bring his trademark fist-bump greeting to DIC Entertainment.

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Pulling the CG Rabbit Out of a Hat

Pixar's latest short, Doug Sweetland's *Presto* is a triumphant homage to the Warner Bros. and MGM classics of yesteryear. by Charles Solomon

Character design by Teddy Newton © Disney/Pixar

Stranded on a bare stage, Presto the Magician desperately needs his assistant's help to perform his act. But Alec Azam the rabbit refuses: he wants the carrot he should have gotten before the show. *Presto*, the fast-paced tale of a magician and his recalcitrant bunny, has been delighting audiences who pack theaters nationwide to see *WALL•E* this summer.

A CG homage to the great Warner Bros. and MGM shorts of the '40s and '50s, *Presto* was directed by Doug Sweetland, one of Pixar's top animators. His previous work includes Woody aping John Wayne in *Toy Story 2* and Sully breaking down when he thinks Boo has been crushed in the trash compactor in *Monsters, Inc*. Like the classic cartoon animators, Sweetland gets all the comic "juice" out of his scenes.

"A large part of my identity growing up

was being the kid who drew cartoons," he said in a recent interview. "I copied Disney and Warner Bros. I copied the funny pages. I copied characters that were completely unknown to me, like Jiggs from *Bringing Up Father*."

Sweetland had never done computer animation when he was hired to work on *Toy Story* during his second year at CalArts: "While I was in school, both my parents said, 'Take the computer classes,' and I blew them off: 'I don't want to do computer animation, I want to do hand-drawn animation.' But *Toy Story* was too awesome a project to pass up, and the talent at Pixar was too great to resist."

Pete Docter and Andrew Stanton saw potential in Sweetland's student films, and Docter convinced Pixar to hire him. "Doug is sort of the Milt Kahl of our studio—we'd give him the characters as they were first built and articulated, and he'd do these great scenes that would define the characters and push the models further than you thought they could go," Docter commented. "The computer to him seems almost like an extension of his arm; he gets it to do things with such apparent ease that it's quite disarming."

"My approach to animation goes back to all the drawing I did as a kid: I don't look at a design in terms of a computer model," Sweetland countered. "Your arm continues through the mouse, through the computer and into the character. Ideally, the medium all but disappears and it simply performs an action the way that you imagined it."

He cites Tex Avery, Chuck Jones, Friz Freleng and the Hanna-Barbera *Tom and Jerry* cartoons as influences on *Presto*—which comes as no surprise to anyone who's enjoyed the short's fast-paced gags. But the older short's also provided a model when it came to hammering out the story, which Sweetland describes as "a really long, slow journey until we realized the classic cartoons offered the answer to the problem; set-ups don't get any quicker or relationships more clearly delineated. That's how Presto became the antagonist, and Alec the clear protagonist.

Doug Sweetland

"Once we locked into a classic cartoon model, we decided to go all the way, but it wasn't simply an aesthetic choice. I found that mimicking 2D was a great way of using a visual understatement that adds a little bit of space, a little bit of dryness, and is a great way of setting up the jokes," he continued. "Also, the easiest thing to do in computer animation is make the cameras fly around. But the camera in a 2D cartoon is like a natural born straight man. Instead of having the camera go crazy so you lose sight of the joke, we primarily used a single axis locked head camera."

Sweetland also animated several shots in *Presto*. When he talks about his work, it's clear that animating is his first love.

"I did the shot of Presto falling, the pile of stuff smashing behind him and him flying out of the hat and landing like a ballerina. I couldn't keep my hands off that scene—I'm known here as a guy who'll do the flailing shots," he said with a laugh. "As an animator, you usually don't get to work on a story you've created. I seized that opportunity by giving myself the shot, and I'm happy to report it was a totally new kind of bliss." ■

***Presto* is currently playing with *WALL•E* in theaters nationwide.**

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Chris Williams

Alien Territory

Director Chris Williams gets double exposure with his 3-D short *Glago's Guest*. by Michael Mallory

There is more going on in the new Walt Disney Animation short, *Glago's Guest*, than meets the eye—regardless of whether those eyes are covered by 3-D stereoscopic glasses or not. The deceptively simple story of a stern, stoic Russian soldier patrolling his godforsaken patch of Siberia in total tedium until his life is altered by the unexpected visit of strangers from afar was conceived and directed by first-time director Chris Williams, a 13-year veteran of the Disney story department. In both look and tone, it stands as one of the more unusual animated projects to come out from under the Sorcerer's Hat at the legendary studio. But it is also a harbinger of things to come under the new Disney Animation Shorts program launched by *Glago's* producer Chuck Williams (no relation) at the instigation of Mickey's new leader, John Lasseter.

Glago's Guest is the second short to come out of the new program (last year's Annie-nominated *How to Hook Up Your Home Theater* starring Goofy was the first), whose four tenets, Chuck says, are to identify new talent, explore new technologies, work in different animation styles and stay connected to the industry—particularly the festival circuit. The talent-search angle is clearly working, since director Chris Williams had only just gotten started on *Glago* when he was asked to split his time by also co-directing (with Byron Howard) the upcoming feature *Bolt*.

Animated with basic Maya packages and some proprietary add-ons (including an enhancement to the studio's FABRIC cloth simulator and lighting package made from scratch), *Glago's Guest*'s basic look is described by Chuck as "stylized realism." The realism part, Chris would discover, was one of the bigger challenges of the film.

"John Lasseter really stresses research and getting things right," Chris says. "I knew that, but I didn't understand just how much he took that to heart." Among the details he had to get just right were Glago's binoculars, which were accurate to the time and place, the pen and ink well on his desk, his lantern and, most specifically, his rifle. "Being Canadian, I don't know anything about guns," Chris laughs, "so we had to go to a place where they had movie guns and real guns, and we had to study each step of the loading procedure." To give the rifle the proper stylized realism, the silhouette of a real one was stretched and tweaked a bit and then textured. The *Glago* team also screened and studied *Dr. Zhivago* and a handful of Russian films in order to nail the expansive, frigid setting.

But it was the character of Glago himself that provided a challenge for the animation team, given his stoic, corseted demeanor. "Chris was really keen on a minimalist approach to Glago's acting and it was hard for the animators, who were just coming off *Meet the Robinsons,* to be that subtle," says Chuck. "The arc of the character is that he smiles at the end, so [they had to find] little increments in between that are going to show signs of his character."

All new Disney and Pixar CGI films, short or long, will be released in some theaters in stereoscopic 3-D. In this instance, though, don't expect to see the kind of poke-in-the-eye trick shots that traditionally characterize the format. Given its visual simplicity (one exterior set, one interior), the stereoscopic enhancement of *Glago's Guest* is completely organic. "There has not been anything where I didn't get what I wanted because of the 3-D," Chris says. "At the same time, we haven't had any restrictions or requests for things that are specifically designed for a 3-D film."

Glago's Guest will front *Bolt*, the story of a TV-star dog who has to make his way through the real world, when it is released November 26, giving Chris Williams an auspicious double-feature directorial debut. "It's been a crazy year-and-a-half," he deadpans. ■

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The Greatest CG Show on Earth?

SIGGRAPH 2008 promises to be one heck of an extravaganza, bursting with informative sessions, cutting-edge shorts, studio presentations and industry screenings. (Oh, and don't forget to pick up a pair of 3-D glasses!) by Ramin Zahed

Bigger, better, a heck of a lot more entertaining—that's one way to describe the amazing multitude of programs, panels, screenings and special events planned for the CG extravaganza taking place August 11-15 at the Los Angeles Convention Center. Over the past three decades, SIGGRAPH has become *the* event to attend if you need to be on top of all things CG—be it the latest animation techniques, the latest software releases, academic papers, scientific applications or the visual-effects laden showcases from ILM, Weta and Sony. But all signs indicate that the 35th edition may be the one we're going to remember for a long time.

Animation Mother poster art created by Meats Meier

"I've been involved with SIGGRAPH for many years and have been on the festival committee, and some of the years the work was very brooding and emotional and dark, but this year, perhaps it was the jury we had or just the projects that were submitted, but things are just incredibly fun," says Jill Smolin, the event's incredibly energetic and resourceful conference entertainment director. "I think it was also really important to create an integrated experience for people who love, need and crave it."

Jill Smolin

Seriously, if you don't find something to love this year, you're not looking hard enough. The Computer Animation Festival honorees were selected from over 900 submissions from around the world. "With nearly 30 jurors from all corners of the globe and two separate jury meetings, this year's Computer Animation Festival jury was one of the most comprehensive in the festival's history," says the festival's jury co-chair Samuel Lord Black.

Do Penguins Fly?

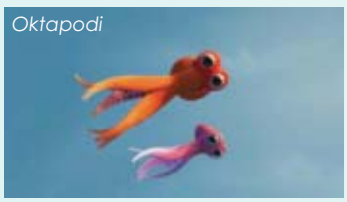
Bolides (Supinfocom), *Carbon Footprint* (Jellyfish Pictures), *Madagascar: Escape 2 Africa* (DreamWorks Animation), *Oktapodi* (Gobelins) and *The Chemical Brothers: The Salmon Dance* (Framestore CFC) are this year's Best of Show nominees. Jury Award nominees are *Chump and Clump* (Michael Herm, Stephan Sacher), *Mauvais Rôle* (Supinfocom), *Oktapodi* (Gobelins), *Our Wonderful Nature* (Tomer Eshed, HFF Potsdam) and *The Plush Life* (Timothy Heath). *893* (Supinfocom), *Al Dente* (Supinfocom), *Bärenbraut* (Filmakademie Baden-Württemberg), *Blind Spot* (Gobelins) and *Mauvais Rôle* (Supinfocom) are this year's Best Student Piece nominees.

Once again, super-achieving students from France's Supinfocom and Gobelins and Germany's Filmakademie Baden-Württtemberg managed to pull amazing animated shorts out of their hats. "We continue to see fresh, wonderful and funny pieces from these student animators at these schools," says Smolin. "These kids get to express themselves, and their projects are not edited by committees. However, I will say that when you look at these pieces, it's upsetting that we aren't getting as many [top contenders] from American students. We have many fine animation programs and great teachers in the U.S., so it was puzzling for us to see this trend."

Smolin recalls a time when viewers could really notice the machinery behind the animation, but all of that's history now. "You can really see the art. There are some student shorts that are truly exquisite. Even when there are pieces that are rendered badly, they use the tools to their advantage."

Regardless of technique, it all boils down to the ability of animation to make us laugh, think and comment on our common experiences as humans. "Animation is, of course, a technical art—and you can find a wealth of information and discussion about the technology at the conference—but it all comes down to whether the coyote running into the mountain once again is going to make you laugh or feel good? Does it make you think? That's what it's all about!"

Bjork's Wanderlust Video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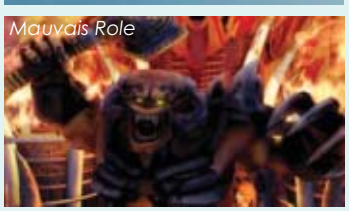
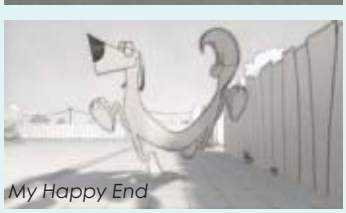

Mauvais Role

Chump and Clump


My Happy End

There are obviously numerous tracks you can take to plan your SIGGRAPH adventure. Here are some of the highlights that you won't want to miss:

Words to Live By. You've got to be pretty special to be a featured speaker at the conference: This year, we have Disney/Pixar's president Ed Catmull talking about managing the creative environment, *U2 3D* director Catherine Owens discussing how to bring emotion to technology and robotics expert and computer science professor Takeo Kanade weighing in on the achievements of the past three decades in his area of expertise. Take copious notes!

Three Hot Summer Nights. Three incredible nights of special programs hosted by major studios are part of this year's high-voltage presentations at the Nokia Theater:

On Tuesday, Pixar Studios is offering a rare screening of Frederic Back's Oscar-winning film *The Man Who Planted Trees*, followed by a must-see conversation between Back and Disney/Pixar's chief creative officer John Lasseter. The evening also features a screening of *The Pixar Story*, with an intro by director Leslie Iwerks and "friends!"

Wednesday night brings a timely salute to the life and work of visual effects master Stan Winston, presented by Sony Pictures Imageworks. One of Winston's classic films will follow the discussion.

LucasFilm takes center stage on Thursday, with a sneak peek of *Star Wars: The Clone Wars*. Director Dave Filoni and ILM vfx master John Knoll will be on hand to discuss the film's unique design elements, challenges and achievements.

The Glamour of Awards Season in August! For the first time, organizers have planned a live festival awards ceremony scheduled for Thursday, August 14, at 3:45 p. m. at the Nokia Theater. The event is hosted by computer graphics research guru Ken Perlin. (Try the addictive games on Ken's website at www.mrl.nyu.edu/~perlin).

Brush Up on Your Toon History. Animation veteran and all-around great guy Frank Gladstone has condensed his normally 12-week-long class on the history of animation into an all-day affair. We can't imagine a better way to spend Tuesday the 12th (8:30 a.m. to 5:30 p.m.).

Depth of Vision. You can catch up with all the latest innovations in the world of stereoscopic 3-D and find out what the future holds for the medium in a special two-day event (Monday the 11th and Tuesday the 12th). Phil McNally of DreamWorks Animation, Robert Neuman of Disney Animation, Brian Van't Hul of LAIKA and Buzz Hays of Sony Pictures Imageworks will talk about some of their stereoscopic projects and show highlights of *Beowulf, Bolt, Coraline* and *Monsters vs. Aliens*.

Frank and Ollie Forever. You can't call yourself a true animation fan if you don't have an appreciation for the work and legacy of Frank Thomas and Ollie Johnston. Animation Mentor will present a panel about the amazing duo, moderated by toon veteran Tom Sito on Wednesday, August 13. Disney producer Don Hahn (*The Lion King*), DreamWorks animator Dave Burgess (*Monsters vs. Aliens*), Animation Guild president Kevin Koch and indie filmmaker (and son of Frank Thomas) Theodore Thomas will be part of the distinguished panel, which will be followed by a brief documentary, produced by Animation Mentor.

Flash: The Next Generation. This is not your father's Macromedia tool! Join moderator par excellence Rita Street of Radar Cartoons as she and her expert panelists delve into some of the various aspects of the technology and showcase some of the greatest projects made with this tool. Evan Spiridellis of JibJab, Ken Martin of BLITZ Agency, Greg Araya of Cartoon Network's Flash unit, Ashley Postlewaite of Renegade Animation and Dave Markowitz of Disney Internet Group will be sharing their expertise, if not their deepest secrets!

Meet the Artists. Do you want to learn more about the talented Gobelins students who made the nominated short *Oktapodi*? Have you wondered what it's like to be the producer of Pixar's amazing new short *Presto*? Are you curious about ILM veteran Rob Coleman's new animation company, Lightstream? Perhaps, you're dying to know the vfx secrets of the latest *Mummy* movie or the animation techniques used in *Kung Fu Panda* and *Horton Hears A Who*? They're all part of the mix of this year's special daily programs.

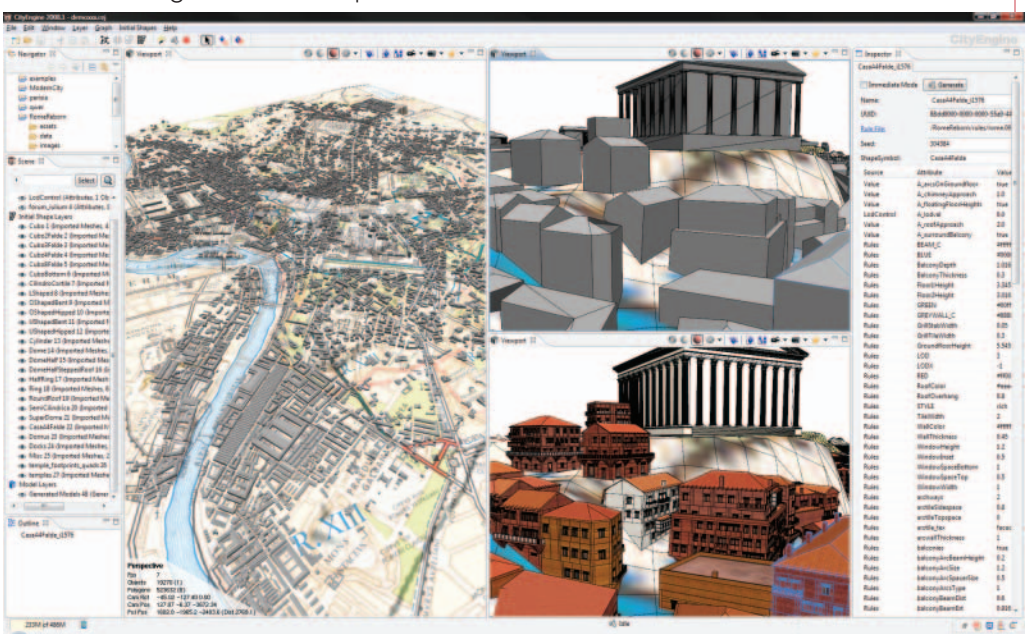
Get Ready for the Big Easy: If you want to get a head start on next year's event, you may want to think about booking your trip to New Orleans, where SIGGRAPH '09 will be taking place. It may be hot and humid, but just think about all the great Cajun food and amazing music that will go hand in hand with the CG entertainment next summer!

For more info, visit www.siggraph.org/s2008.

Building Rome for One Week

The future plunges into the past in the lobby of the Los Angeles Convention Center at SIGGRAPH this month: *Rome Reborn* is billed as the largest virtual historical reconstruction ever built, and is certainly something to behold. For years, time travel through virtual reality has held promise for graphics geeks, history professors and archeologists, but no one has seen anything like this enormous international collaboration.

Attendees, even those holding the most inexpensive day passes, can wander virtually among thousands of buildings in ancient, imperial Rome at the peak of its glory, 320 A.D., the time of Constantine the Great. The exhibit features three versions of the ongoing construction project: *Rome Reborn 1.0*, *1.1* and *2.0*. The latter two debut at SIGGRAPH.



Procedural's CityEngine technology, powered by NVIDIA Quadro graphics cards, gave IATH's *Rome Reborn* 2.O more realistic textures while allowing the project to come together 10 times faster than other existing modeling and graphics solutions.

"The unique thing about this project is that it's historically accurate," says Cole Krumbholz, a researcher at the non-profit public interest organization, MITRE Corporation, who helped organize the SIGGRAPH exhibit. "It's changing the way this community of scholars is working."

Rome Reborn 1.0, unveiled a year ago, is a digital model that includes 7,000 3D buildings within the Aurelian Walls as they might have appeared at the height of Rome's urban development. Ten years in the making, the $2 million brainchild of Bernard Frischer, now director of IATH at the University of Virginia, features 31 buildings modeled at a scale of 1:1 at the UCLA Cultural Virtual Reality Laboratory. The rest, modeled in lower resolution, rely on textures derived from 3D scans of a 1:250 plaster-of-Paris model in Rome's Museum of Roman Civilization; the department of Design of the Politecnico di Milano created the models. Of those, an additional 180 buildings will eventually appear at 1:1 scale. The interactive, real-time simulation runs on PCs through MultiGen Creator using Open Scene Graph.

Rome Reborn 1.1, created by IBM and IATH, converts the *1.0* models into BVH format and runs on IBM's Cell platform, and with that transition came improvements in interactivity and rendering quality. *1.1* also includes a new model of Circus Maximus, which the Ausonius Institute at the Michel de Montaigne University-Bordeaux III created.

For *Rome Reborn 2.0*, IATH gave the models a facelift using archaeological research from the Université de Caen and Procedural's CityEngine technology, which provided more realistic texturing and procedurally generated geometry. With mental images' RealityServer, the facelift runs on the web; the technology preserves the digital rights of the model by rendering frames and sending those images across the Internet rather than geometry. Eventually, IATH plans to publish *Rome Reborn 2.0* on the web through its SAVE project.

Inside the Rome Reborn exhibition area at SIGGRAPH, attendees can hear talks by the collaborators, look at high resolution renderings of the models, interact with various components, and otherwise immerse themselves in images on a 24-foot wide, 27 megapixel screen. "We have a number of interfaces to the model so as attendees walk through the exhibition area, they can experience it in different ways," says Krumbholz. "And, as they navigate through Rome, they can access documents that discuss the evidence behind particular features of a model and learn about its construction."

Attendees can look inside the Curia Julia, the Roman Senate House in the Roman Forum and admire the mosaics on the floor, or stand back and look at the vast Circus Maximus from afar. They can walk, virtually, through the marble Arch of Septimius Severus, which still stands in Rome, and past the digitally reconstructed Temple of Saturn, of which only the portico and eight columns remain today. They can see the whole of Rome laid out in front of them. Time traveling in the eternal city is a great way to spend a day or two—and you don't have to worry about all the nasty politics and diseases of that era. ■

—by Barbara Robertson

Principally 3D

Donovan Keith reinvents the *Principles of Animation* for MAXON's Cineversity. by Barbara Robertson

It might seem a stretch that a 22-year-old animator and actor would be hired to create a 3D interpretation of the 2D classic, *Principles of Animation*. But, Donovan Keith began producing 3D animations with MAXON's CINEMA 4D when he was 13, and he has taught animation for nine years. The unique set of 12 step-by-step tutorials he developed are among the latest additions to MAXON's online training resource, Cineversity.

"My goal with the *Principles of Animation* was to create a conceptual understanding that could be applied to a variety of projects," Keith says. "First, conceptual understanding, then guided practice and then problem solving using the new knowledge."

Keith's tutorials start with a discrete, simple example of each principle. He teaches anticipation, for example, by having the students move a box with a ball. That leads to a ball and a wall problem; making use of anticipation to get the ball over the wall.

"Often it's better to teach one skill in isolation," he says. "In teaching animation classes, I've learned to parse the information down into itty bitty chunks that build on each other. The amount of planning that goes into these tutorials is significant."

Keith started using CINEMA 4D when he and a friend from middle school took a community college class in animation. For his film, Keith animated an orca whale that swims through a pack of fish, jumps out of the water and splashes.

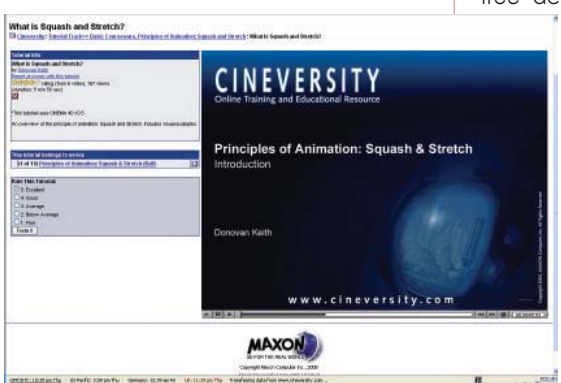
"The plot was a little thin," he laughs now. "I ended it with 'Fin.' I was really proud of the pun."

Paul Babb, president of MAXON USA, judged the animated films created during the class, and after class, Keith called him.

"By the time he was 14, he was doing demos for us at MacWorld," says Babb. "He was a whiz kid and a natural fit. He's one of those people who gets all aspects of it."

Soon, he was teaching animation to his fellow students at a continuation high school, Royal Sunset in Hayward, Calif., where his father was the principal. "He knew I loved animation," Keith says, "and that I was oddly competent at it."

By age 15, Keith had entered U.C. Santa Cruz as a film and digital media major, graduating when he was 18. After graduation, he returned to his former high school, this time as a full time instructor teaching classes in 3D animation, Photoshop, yearbook production and video production.



He also worked with other teachers to found an art-themed high school and completed a Masters degree in cross-cultural education. The high-school program, now in its third year, has enrolled more than 250 students. Now living in Hollywood, Keith is developing a turnkey yearbook curriculum to help first-year teachers, serves on the advisory board for the art-themed school, does freelance animation and graphic design work, takes movie roles when they come up and, having finished the *Principles of Animation*, is working on additional Cineversity tutorials.

Donovan Keith

Those tutorials will join approximately 1,000 other tutorials in MAXON's online classes, which are available to the 33,000 forum members who visit the site. "It was a huge investment and a little bit of a loss in the first year, but it took off like gangbusters the second year," says Babb. "So, we reinvested. And now, we're stepping up the back end." A redesigned user interface is scheduled for later this year, along with additional content and the company's first experiments with hands-on online training.

"We're planning to try training up to three people online at the same time," Babb says. "We're looking for interesting new ways to help people with projects and to disseminate information."

Of the 1,000 tutorials, approximately 250 are free. To access the others, forum members pay $295 the first year and $95 each year after that. (Teachers, though, have free access to all the tutorials and use some in grades as low as third grade.)

"At first, people hesitated," Babb says. "But now, they realize that $295 for 180 hours of video instruction is not a lot." Among the tutorials are many from MAXON author Volker Sassmannshausen, better known as "Dr. Sassi," an active forum member. "Next, he's going to build a complete animated short and will break it down step by step on Cineversity so anyone can follow his steps," Babb says. "Donovan [Keith] is also working on new introductory tutorials."

For these, Keith plans to teach students how to model and animate a character, again keeping simple steps in mind.

"My goal is to take students from ground zero to doing what they got into this for," he says, "which is animating characters and bringing life to them. They all say, 'OK, when do I create Shrek?' There are so many steps leading to the point where they can do that. I'm hoping to streamline the process and make it as easy as possible." ■

For more info, visit www.cineversity.com or www.maxon.net.

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3D Animation & Visual Effects student work by Zheng Tang

Classical Animation student work by Esteban Azuela

Digital Character Animation student work by Daniel Bohrer

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VFS student work by Zack Mathew

VFS ANIMATION & VISUAL EFFECTS

vfs.com/animationvfx

Visit VFS at SIGGRAPH **Booth #1315**, and join Digital Character Animation Senior Instructor **Greg Berridge** for his Tech Talk: *Telling the Whole Story: A VFS Animation Case Study* on **August 13, 1:00 – 2:30pm**. Greg will break down the entire production of *The Switch*.

News Bytes from the Expo:

A round-up of the latest tech news from SIGGRAPH '08

Face the Music

Image Metrics, one of the top providers of facial animation solutions, will make its first appearance as a SIGGRAPH exhibitor this year (booth #1229). The company will be demonstrating its markerless, makeup-free facial animation technology and introducing Emily, a completely photo-realistic CG character developed in conjunction with 3D digital scanning provided by the brilliant Paul Debevec of USC. We are still reeling over Image Metrics' clever facial animation seen in Gnarls Barkley's video for "Who's Gonna Save My Soul," in which the lead singer Cee-Lo's lips were transplanted on a beating heart. Make sure you stop by their booth to check out some of their cool projects and hear their latest news.

Meet Reboot 3.0

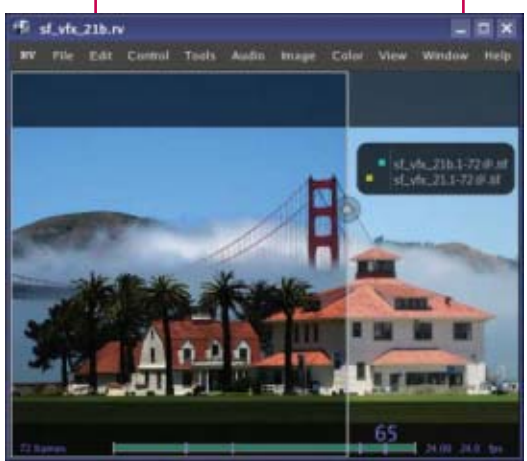
Rainmaker Entertainment will be making the rounds at the CG confab this year with two key projects in various stages of development. *Reboot*, one of the first and most popular CG-animated TV properties of our time, is being re-developed as a trilogy of feature-length films with Jon Cooksey (*Rugrats, The Outer Limits*) attached as writer. The Rainmaker team recently introduced a new *Reboot* comic on the project's official website (www.reboot.com) using ideas pitched by the fans of the show. Among the other projects the company has in the pipeline are *Escape from Planet Earth*, a theatrical feature with the Weinstein Company, and the animated sequel to *The Nutty Professor*. Find out more about the studio's toon slate at www.rainmaker.com.

That French Savoir Faire

Kerlabs founders, from left, Pascall Gallard, Louis Rilling and Rennaud Lottiaux

Trust the French to come up with a solution that can open up the clustering market! The Rennes-based company **Kerlabs** is poised to bring its personalized software solution to clustering issues to the U.S. this year. Kerlabs' easy-to-use **Kerrighed** solution promises to simplify the administration, operation and maintenance of clusters for companies regardless of their size. Offering a virtual SMP, Kerrighed preserves the interface of a simple office machine running Linux. Kerlabs also helps their clients host and manage their Kerrighed cluster. To learn more about the company and its services, visit www.kerlabs.com.

Tweaked to Perfection

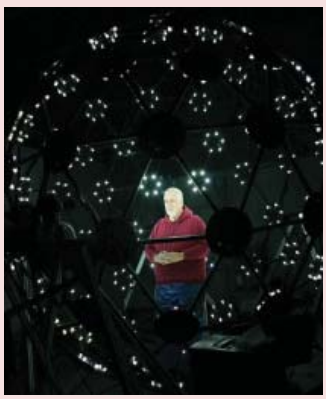


That memorable New York tidal wave sequence in *The Day After Tomorrow* put the vfx studio **Tweak Films** on the digital map a few years ago. Now, company founders Jim Hourihan and Seth Rosenthal are introducing a new real-time, film res image and sequence viewer called **RV**. The highly customizable cross-platform product is capable of playing back uncompressed film resolution clips and includes native support for stereo 3-D. "High-end shops typically rely on home-grown playback tools that are hard to replace because they're deeply entwined in artist workflows," says Rosenthal. "RV is very customizable and that makes it the first effective replacement for those proprietary viewers." RV is currently available directly through Tweak Software and priced at $299 per node locked license and $369 per floating license. Find out more at www.tweaksoftware.com.

Michael and Victoria: Together Again

3D software and digital content shop **DAZ 3D** will be showcasing the newest version of its male figure Michael 4 and the popular female model Victoria 4 at SIGGRAPH this year (booth #910). CG professionals can also take in demonstrations of the 3D polygonal and subdivision modeling software, Hexagon 2.5, and the content delivery pipeline, MOGBox. The company's rich library of characters and accessories make life a lot easier for artists creating 3D models and avatars for virtual worlds, games, mobile media and more. Visit www.daz3d.com for more info about their latest releases.

A New and Improved Dome



If you were impressed with **Aguru Images**' original **Dome** capture solution, you will be happy to know that the company is bringing the version 2.0 of the product to the confab this year. The new tool offers a 300X improvement in shape measurement solution when compared with industry standards. It also automatically derives a host of additional information from a performer or a scanned object, including diffuse, specular, RGB diffuse normal and specular normal maps for more accurate digital depictions. The Aguru Dome was originally developed by USC's Paul Debevec. It's the first product of its kind to be made available commercially to facilities around the world. You can check out the capabilities of Dome 2.0 at Booth #347 or visit www.aguruimages.com to learn more.

MyToons Launches High-Def Contest

If you want a clearer, brighter future in animation, you may want to enter **MyToons.com**'s **HD Online Animation Contest,** *Get with the Times!* The Grand Prize winner will see see their animation played on a Clear Channel billboard, powered by Adobe Flash technology, in Times Square. Animators are invited to submit their HD animations at MyToons.com/contests/TimesSquare.

Running through September 4, 2008, *Get with the Times!* invites animators to upload their HD animations for a chance to win a two-night trip to New York City to eat dinner at the famous Chop Suey restaurant while watching their animation play once every hour on the Spectacolor HD Clear Channel billboard over Times Square. In addition to this all-inclusive trip, the winner will also take home a copy of Adobe Creative Suite 3 Master Collection.

Weekly winners are determined by a combination of community votes and MyToons judging, and will take home an iPod Nano filled to the brim with MyToons animation. Site-wide voting is ongoing and will continue through September 4. The Grand Prize Winner will be announced on September 12, and two runners-up will also take home a copy of Adobe Creative Suite 3 Master Collection. To learn more visit **MyToons.com**.

Toon Boom Ups the Ante

Next time you hear someone complain about the challenges of animating a project, just send them straight to the **Toon Boom** website (www.toomboom.com). The Montreal-based animation software powerhouse recently announced the release of **Toon Boom Studio 4.5** and **Flip Boom Classic**. These enhanced products offer new features designed to streamline the process for both professional users and novice animators.

The latest version of Studio offers better integration with Photoshop files, extended ease of use and more export options to iTunes and YouTube. Toon Boom is promoting it as the perfect upgrade for Flip Boom and Animation-ish, which are geared more to novice animators. Users can employ Studio 4.5 to add animation over videos, print drawings to create flipbooks or use as a reference and import multi-layer Photoshop files and create more impressive multiplane effects. The release also offers enhanced drag-and-drop capability and allows animators to import Flip Boom and Animation-ish projects for enhanced animation.

Flip Boom Classic is a new and improved version of Flip Boom, an animation solution for kids which won a Parent's Choice Gold Award and was a finalist for the Canadian New Media Awards. The software allows youngsters to print flip books of their drawings. The new version features a resizable, user-friendly interface and gives users the ability to set up animation within the new camera frame, lay out drawings on top of each other and publish animation directly to an iPod. Available in electronic format only, Flip Boom Classic runs on Windows XP, Vista and Mac OS X 10.4 and 10.5. The software can be purchased for $39.99, and current Flip Boom customers can upgrade for $9.99. For more information, go to www.toonboom.com/products/flipboom.

VICON Gets It *Twisted*

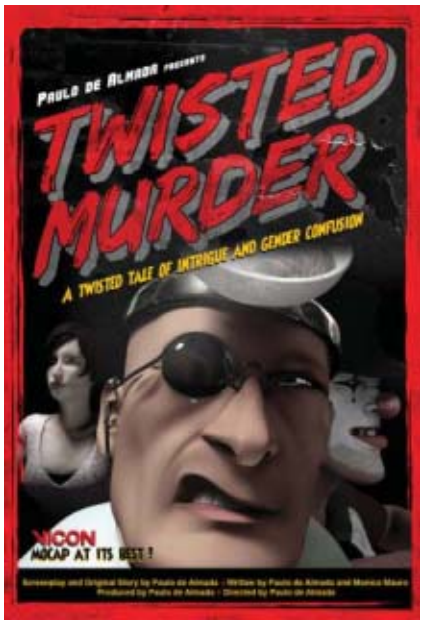
VICON Film Fest winner Paulo de Almada turns a mo-cap challenge into a film noir freakshow—and we like it.

By Mercedes Milligan

Launched at last year's SIGGRAPH event in San Diego, the VICON Film Festival can be most accurately summed up as the *Iron Chef* of CG fests. The secret ingredient: An assortment of recorded performance-capture moves, courtesy of the Oscar-winning tech house, to be utilized in any matter of story or style the filmmaker wishes. "With this contest, we're making motion capture accessible to many artists who may have never had the opportunity to work with capture data before—and we look forward to exposing the next generation of film and games creatives to the flexibility of animating with motion capture," says Robin Pengelly, VP of VICON's entertainment division. The submissions were judged by a diverse panel—including Mick Morris of Audiomotion, ILM digital supervisor Mike Sanders and USC film technology educator Eric Furie—and the winner was announced in June of this year.

Twisted Murder, which captured the $10,000 first prize, is a disturbing tale of a detective trying to unravel his girlfriend's mysterious death. Intrigue and gender confusion combine with classic noirish tones to deliver, as the title promises, a startling twist as the murderer is finally discovered. All this in just under the Fest's five minute running time limit. Director Paulo de Almada, who co-wrote the script with his wife Monica L. Mauro, cites his influences as film noir pieces *Mildred Pierce* and *The Killing*, and the original *Dragnet* series—which he says influenced his choice of the flat, monologue voice-over. "Oh, and my fertile imagination," he adds.

In addition to the VICON captures, de Almada used traditional 2D and 3D animation, HDRI and photogrametry techniques and Maya Cloth to bring his "very twisted short" to life. Though the Los Angeles, Calif.-based CG artist (currently with Santa Monica's A52) had limited experience with the technology, de Almada was quickly won over by motion capture's facile allure. "Mo-cap allowed me to complete the project within the timeframe given and still be creative. There were over 100 movements to choose from, the sky was the limit," he enthuses, "It helped the story go off the beaten path; I would start with one idea, see a mo-cap movement I *had* to use, and then change the story a little to accommodate it." Not only was de Almada impressed with the quality and range of the available library, but with the novel approach of the festival in general, saying that the whole idea necessitates that both technical and creative abilities come to the fore—sensible priorities in this competitive and now high-tech industry. But no matter what technology you're working with, some things never change: "I think the story is always the most challenging [part]," he says.



Paulo de Almada

Now that he's tackled the VICON challenge, de Almada plans to send *Twisted Murder* on to other major festivals, so keep your eyes peeled to learn what he means by telling us the film's cryptic message is "If you are a monkey, beware of strange scientists." If all goes well, the mystery won't end there—the director hopes that the stellar industry reputation of VICON will open up the possibility of a feature-length *Twisted* film, or another long form project. "I love 3D production, that is what I do, but my goal is to direct CG or live-action feature films." Are you listening, Hollywood?

In the meantime, de Almada keeps busy with his constant slew of professional and personal projects, and promises to follow up on his recent success: "The next mo-cap adventure is called … wait," he teases, "it's a surprise. Let's just say, if you thought this last one was twisted, you ain't seen nothing yet." From what we've seen in *Twisted Murder*, we're inclined to believe him. ■

You can keep up with Paulo de Almada's work at his website, www.dealmada.com. The VICON Film Festival 2008-09 will be soliciting entries primarily from the education sector. More information will be announced at the SIGGRAPH Conference, August 12-14 at the LA Convention Center; VICON will be exhibiting in booth 1101.

Meet
the host of
Toon In! ... to the
World of Animation,
Tee Bosustow, at the
Animation Magazine
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Toon Recruiters Ramp Up for Job Seekers

Who they are, what they want and how to land a job at top CG studios during SIGGRAPH. by Ellen Wolff

At the start of every SIGGRAPH, recruiters for animation and visual effects studios do something that you might not expect competitors to do—they sit down together for breakfast. "It's sort of like breaking bread before we split up and start raiding each other's companies," laughs Stan Szymanski, Sony Imageworks' senior vice president of digital production and creative resources. The annual breakfast (which the studios take turns sponsoring) reflects the fairly small world in which recruiters operate. It also demonstrates SIGGRAPH's standing as a "can't miss" event for CG talent-seekers. Szymanski remarks, "Every company in animation or effects—or combinations thereof—is there in full force."

Although SIGGRAPH is a meet-and-greet place for studios of all sizes, the major houses have especially well-organized recruitment teams at this year's convention. Both Pixar and DreamWorks are searching for talent to help them meet their schedules of releasing two animated features a year, while Sony is recruiting for both its feature animation division and its digital effects team.

DreamWorks Animation

Upon entering the LA Convention Center for SIGGRAPH '08, you may notice a DreamWorks booth in the main lobby—in conjunction with its sponsorship of the animation competition FJORG! But the hiring action for DreamWorks recruiters will be upstairs in Room 510, where the studio's four-person team will be conducting job interviews. According to DreamWorks recruiter Deanne Koehn, "We figured that the best way to make our presence at SIGGRAPH beneficial was to focus on being able to talk to talent. Sometimes it's so loud and crazy on the floor we can't hear ourselves think, much less hear a candidate. So for the last few years we've had a recruiting suite that's worked well for us."

DreamWorks is especially interested in candidates that recruiter Kim Mackey calls "generalists." "These people could be a fit for us in multiple areas. Because we have two movies coming out every year, there are lots of projects in development they could move into.

An important focus will be on recruiting recent graduates, and DreamWorks makes a point of connecting with SIGGRAPH's cadres of young volunteers. "Each year I speak to the volunteer forums," says Koehn. "Our job involves not only hiring available talent, but building relationships with students who will come to us when they graduate.

"We're not focusing any of our efforts on any one area," Koehn adds. "We just can't. It's a hugely international effort. We've had a largely international population since the beginning days of DreamWorks, when Ambli-mation was centered in the U.K.; so we look everywhere. We've found people who've just stopped by our recruiting suite and dropped off their reels. We've scrambled to get them interviewed the very next day!"

Pixar

Pixar's booth on the SIGGRAPH convention floor will definitely be a mecca for job seekers, since it is headquarters for both the animation studio and its RenderMan software company. "We're definitely seeing more open positions on both the technical and the art side," says Robin McDonald, senior recruiter for technical directors and software engineers. "We're getting the studio ready to be able to put out new films."

But McDonald stresses that the actual application process will be happening online. "We're not collecting reels at the booth. We're directing people to our website to apply to positions. At the booth, we'll be letting people know what positions we have open and answering questions."

"We have enough staff at the booth that we'll have the luxury of talking to people," adds Pamela Harbridge, senior recruiter for animation, art and story. "There is a room within the booth where we can talk, but we can also go out with them for coffee."

Harbridge expects to see about a 50-50 split between applicants right out of school and experienced professionals. "Student reels have gotten really impressive. I think that has to do with the increased outreach that studios do with professors." Students still in school will also flock to Pixar's booth to ask about internships, so the company plans to have recruiters from its university relations department on deck to handle those inquiries.

In advance of SIGGRAPH Pixar does see a bit of a spike in online applicants, but Harbridge says the next step in their application process can't happen at the convention itself. "We're not set up to do actual hiring interviews. We can do an initial screening, but the next step involves their meeting with 10 to 15 people. For that, we fly them to Emeryville."

Disney Animation Studios

The Mouse House is also going through a very healthy cycle this year, with both traditionally hand-drawn and CG-animated productions moving forward in the pipeline. "Both formats require immense creative aesthetic, high problem solving skills and an interest to work with various teams," says Ann Le Cam, VP of human resources at the studio. Among Disney's high-profile upcoming features are *Bolt* (November 2008), *The Princess and the Frog* (November 2009) and *Rapunzel* (2010).

Deanne Koehn

Kim Mackey

Pamela Harbridge

Robin McDonald

Barry Weiss

Stan Szymanski

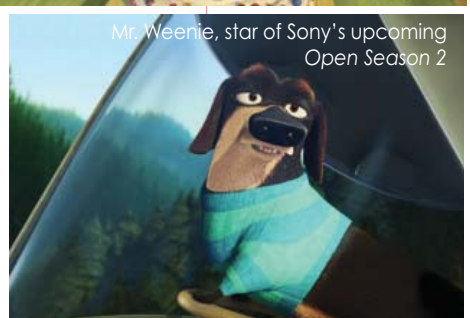
"Our artists, technical directors, engineers and production management staff have the great role of bringing our director's vision to life whether it be 2D or CG," says Le Cam. "When hiring animators specifically, we look for reels that illustrate a great sense of composition and staging, entertainment and acting, caricature, dialogue and lip sync, style, physics, timing and originality."

Sony

The twin recruiting needs of Sony Pictures Animation and Imageworks have led to a high-profile presence at SIGGRAPH, with a booth on the convention floor and participation in several organized events. Senior VP Stan Szymanski will speak to a class on "Getting the Job You Want in Computer Graphics," and he'll present sample reels of past hires to show what's been successful.

"I'll be doing a presentation about how to get your stuff seen by people like me," says Szymanski. "I tend to dwell in the land of professional recruiting, focusing on folks who have worked on projects at various facilities around the world. But for SIGGRAPH, I'm also working on the recruitment of students."

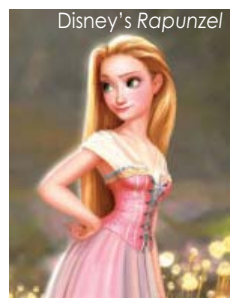
DreamWorks' *Madagascar: Escape 2 Africa*


Mr. Weenie, star of Sony's upcoming *Open Season 2*

Sony is pursuing what senior VP Barry Weiss calls "a dual strategy. We're looking under every rock in terms of the broader talent base, but on the student side we're looking to grow talent in more of a developmental fashion." At SIGGRAPH, Sony execs will meet with teachers from the 18 schools that have participated in the IPAX program (Imageworks Professional Academic Excellence). Weiss, who is Sony's VP of animation production and artist development, says, "That program is a key component of how we approach recruiting. The point of building relationships with schools is that when students graduate, they're ready to roll into a pipeline. Of course we'd be thrilled if they landed with us!"

Szymanski also expects to confer with freelance pros at SIGGRAPH to see if their schedules mesh with Sony's upcoming productions. "Based on the globalization of the industry, I see quite a few people who enjoy moving from Vancouver to London to LA. I look at recruiting from a long-term perspective. We talk to people for *years*, and then we re-connect during the five crazed days of SIGGRAPH. If a person isn't right for one of our current projects, I'll tell them who to talk to at other studios." So for some artists, that friendly recruiters' breakfast could pay off after all.

Pixar's *Up*


Disney's *Rapunzel*

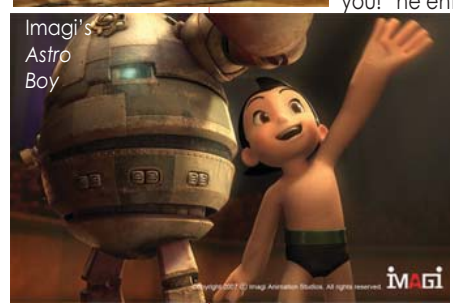
Nickelodeon Animation Studios

The team at Burbank toon shop Nickelodeon, home of 2D toons such as *SpongeBob SquarePants*, *The Mighty B!* and Amy Winfrey's upcoming series *Making Fiends*, is also looking for animators, according to Paul Falcone, the studio's VP of human resources. "We have an active practice of reaching out to talented artists on a proactive basis so that we've got the right talent in place when positions become available."

Nickelodeon's *Back at the Barnyard*

Falcone points out that Nick has a number of CGI productions currently underway—including TV series *The Madagascar Penguins* and *Fanboy*—with more scheduled for the future. "Although we typically don't name the shows themselves in our recruitment outreach, they're productions with high brand-name value and exceptionally strong potential," he says secretively. He also points out that the studio usually looks for applicants with a full working knowledge of Maya and a generalist background. He adds, "Candidates skilled in compositing, rigging, texturing and fx typically find their way to the top of the pile!"

When it comes to specific advice for jobseekers at SIGGRAPH, Falcone says it's best to come prepared with portfolio and reel in hand, but understand that because of the high volume of attendees, Nick staffers may not be able to fit everyone in. He recommends visiting www.mtvncareers.com to apply for full-time positions and internships. "3D texture artists, lighting and compositing artists and vfx artists are always in strong demand, and we pride ourselves on being a particularly fun place to work. In short, the climate is excellent for exceptional candidates with solid CG and Maya skills, and we'd love to hear from you!" he enthuses.



Imagi Studios

Hong Kong and Los Angeles-based animation house Imagi Studios will also have a strong presence at SIGGRAPH this year. The company's senior VP of business affairs and operations Andrew Kopperud tell us that Imagi is hiring visual development artists, rough layout artists and storyboard artists. The studio's upcoming slate includes next year's CG-animated movie *Astro Boy*, helmed by Dave Bowers (*Flushed Away*), *Gatchaman* and *Cat Tale*. "In terms of qualifications, we look for a strong, focused portfolio and work in a variety of mediums, reflecting the candidate's artistic sensibilities," he says. "There is always a demand for talented artists with strong portfolios." ■

WB Pictures' *Journey to the Center of the Earth*

Hey, This Isn't Your Father's 3-D!

Why 3-D movies are making a comeback and how they will affect the world of animation as we know it.

by Chris Grove

Phil McNally, a.k.a. Captain 3-D, is not a superhero. But he is a guru of sorts. At least to the boffins at DreamWorks Animation, where he holds the official title of gobal stereoscopic supervisor. Despite the corporate-speak title, he's an affable guy prone to begin a presentation on the subject of stereoscopic cinema with a joke: If it's so good, how come it keeps going away? And if it's so bad, why does it keep coming back?

Given all the hype about the return of stereoscopic films to the mainstream marketplace, they're good questions. (For purposes of clarity it's now important to differentiate stereoscopic films from the "3D" label. The latter term having been co-opted by the CG animation world circa the release of Pixar's *Toy Story* in 1994). As distinct from the 1950s when stereoscopic filmmaking was the province of B- and C-list directors, in its latest digital iteration stereoscopy is A-list only. Among other notables, James Cameron (*Avatar*), Peter Jackson (untitled *Tintin* trilogy) and Henry Selick (*Coraline*) are all embracing and using the technology. DreamWorks' Jeffery Katzenberg is its most prominent cheerleader: "I look at this as more than an opportunity to simply invigorate an existing theater-going experience, but actually to [give] people who have stopped going into the theater a reason to come back. That's what [stereoscopy] does," he recently told the *Los Angeles Times*.

So what happened to make this technology so popular again? It's all due to the certitudes of the digital world. "In the 1950s, stereoscopy never got past the experimental stage," says McNally. "Now," adds Rob Engle, senior stereographer and digital effects supervisor at Sony Pictures Imageworks, "we can do things that we couldn't do before." The Eisenhower-era calibration between shooting on a stereoscopic camera and then projecting two strips of film on two projectors simultaneously onto one screen was so analog. And so prone to failure. If, for example, one strip of film broke during projection and had to be spliced back together (minus a few frames) by a pimply 18-year old projectionist, the stereo effect would be out of sync and the viewing experience was more or less shot.

"The exhibition side of things killed 3-D film," says Eric Brevig, the veteran visual effects supervisor turned director who gave us this summer's 3-D extravaganza, *Journey to the Center of the Earth*.

The anaglyph solution to the problem, meanwhile, proved to be an inferior substitute. Anaglyph is what most people think of when they hear about stereoscopic films. Two strips of film are replaced by one strip on which are printed offset red and cyan images. Viewed through those goofy red/cyan glasses, the human brain interpolates the image as three-dimensional. The best stereoscopic experience happens when the viewer watches offset images through polarized glasses. (Which is what you'll find in stereoscopic cinemas or theme park rides today such as Disney's *Toy Story Mania!*)

From live-action image acquisition to animation, post-production and projection, new digital tools have rendered image problems a thing of the past. "With the possibility of perfect illumination and perfect alignment, being out of sync is no longer a possibility or problem," McNally says.

In many ways stereoscopy is once again the new frontier for filmmakers. "There's no list of the right way to do things because this is all so new, which leaves a lot of room for creative people to experiment," says Brian Van't Hul, visual effects supervisor on the upcoming stereoscopic animated film *Coraline*. Experimentation being one

> "There's no list of the right way to do things because this [stereoscopy technology] is all so new, which leaves a lot of room for creative people to experiment."
>
> **—Brian Van't Hul, vfx supervisor for *Coraline***

of the operative words on the set of *Coraline*, where the exactitude of image control is helping Van't Hul and his team create some cutting-edge images. With the marriage of the physical capabilities of motion-control cameras and the facts of interocular distance, for example, the filmmakers are able to take four-inch miniatures and absolutely make them occupy a cube of space and look full-size. (Interocular distance is the distance between the eyes that allows the human brain to perceive the world as three-dimensional.)

DreamWorks' *Monsters vs. Aliens*

Given the precision of motion-control rigs, there's no need for a stereoscopic camera. One can use the same camera for both the left and right image by moving the camera laterally between shots—sometimes by less than a millimeter. Playing with the variables of interocular distance, distance from subject-to-camera and the alignment of objects in the 3D space (with an exactness never before possible) make it possible, says Van't Hul, to create new sensations for the audience.

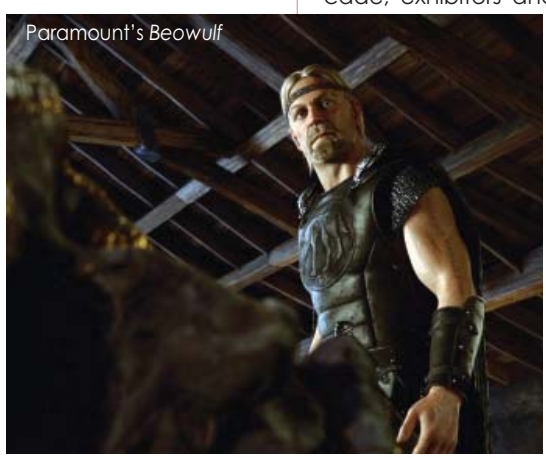
"As with any set of new tools, you want to choreograph the use of them, so that you only jar the audience where you need to jar them," he says. As with any technique, a surfeit of it will inure the audience to its effectiveness.

For Brevig's live-action *Journey to the Center of the Earth*, images were acquired on a digital version of the stereoscopic film camera—two lenses side-by-side shooting onto two film planes (or, in this case, two sets of three CCDs). "There are almost no restrictions on what you do with these cameras," he says. The currently available digital cameras are based on the Sony HD-CAM platform. As for CG animation, making the ubiquitous Maya software stereoscopic has been a fairly simple case of making the virtual camera rigs in the mold of the real world versions. "The fundamental principles of how we see have not changed," says Engle, "but the way we make stereoscopic films has gone though a paradigm shift."

Disney/Pixar's *Bolt*

While the major studios will release three stereoscopic films this year, in 2009 they'll release at least 10, according to various reports at ShoWest this year. And moving forward, DreamWorks Animation reportedly plans to produce *all* its films stereoscopically. For their part, Disney and Pixar have nine stereoscopic movies in the works, including the animated *Bolt* currently scheduled for a Thanksgiving 2008 release. The only fly-in-the-ointment is that there are only an estimated 1,000 3-D screens to show them on out of a total of 39,000 screens in the North American exhibition circuit. As has been the case for over a decade, exhibitors and the studios continue to debate who should be paying for the $150,000 per screen conversion cost. But if consumers finally warm to stereoscopic films en masse, when and how to pay for that conversion will become a non-issue. ■

National Geographic Cinema's *U2 3D*


Paramount's *Beowulf*

So You Want to Make a 3-D Movie...

Frantic Films' vfx supervisor offers smart advice about the new frontier.

by Chris Harvey

As a visual effects supervisor at Frantic Films VFX, I had the chance to work on *Journey to the Center of the Earth,* the first live-action movie ever shot entirely in 3-D. After production wrapped, I was asked countless times about advice I would give to effects artists considering making the jump to the stereo 3-D field.

Generally speaking, breaking into stereo 3-D vfx doesn't really differ from breaking into regular vfx. All the same rules apply: Work hard, be open to criticism, be teachable, don't ever think you've "arrived" and know what you need to know. Regarding stereo work specifically, despite having been around since the 1920s, 3-D filmmaking is still a nascent field, with only very recent technological advancements helping make 3-D movies a much more comfortable, enjoyable and immersive experience.

Not Twice the Pain!

A big question I get asked is how to deal with twice the amount of source data, renders, layers in a comp and plates to track. How does one render and composite it all without going crazy?

We took time to find efficiencies to not double our workflow, and established a solid 3-D stereo pipeline right from the beginning. We took metadata from director Eric Brevig to write proprietary tools that sped up the camera tracking process.

In a 3-D stereo movie, you must render twice—once for the left eye and once for the right. Using NVIDIA's Gelato we created virtual center cameras that shared render calculations between both eyes, eliminating the need to process everything twice. Then we used Awake's stereo stacking tools (our proprietary plugin pack for eyeon Fusion) to composite in stereo. We were literally working in stereo from beginning to end.

Look at Things Differently

On a stereo project, watch for different image distortion than what you might be used to, such as vertical offset, ghosting and embedded elements that are visually in front, but in terms of stereo space, behind. Convergence continuity is also important—if done right, you can do fast cutting in stereo.

Animating for stereo 3-D can be different than for mono. Watch what's going to break frame. If an object is outside the screen depth and then breaks frame, you ruin the stereo effect.

A common question is that of depth of field. While technically you don't need depth of field when working in stereo because your eyes naturally create it like in reality, consider how your work will be viewed—only in stereo, or also in mono? Are you working with live-action elements, with a depth of field baked in that you'll have to match?

Chris Harvey

I can't stress how important it is to have a proper playback system to view your work on a large-format screen, in 3-D. With a stereo job, you blow the footage up 30 feet wide, and suddenly that offset that was less than a pixel looks like three feet. Stereo errors are much more perceptible on the big screen.

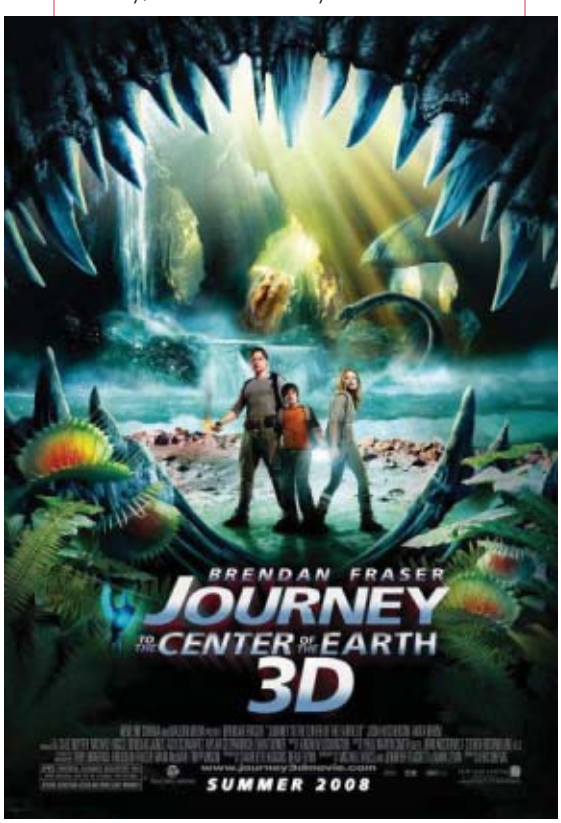
Respect Stereo 3-D as a Storytelling Device

Understand how to use stereo for telling a story, but don't forget all the old rules about what makes a good film still apply: Story, story, story.

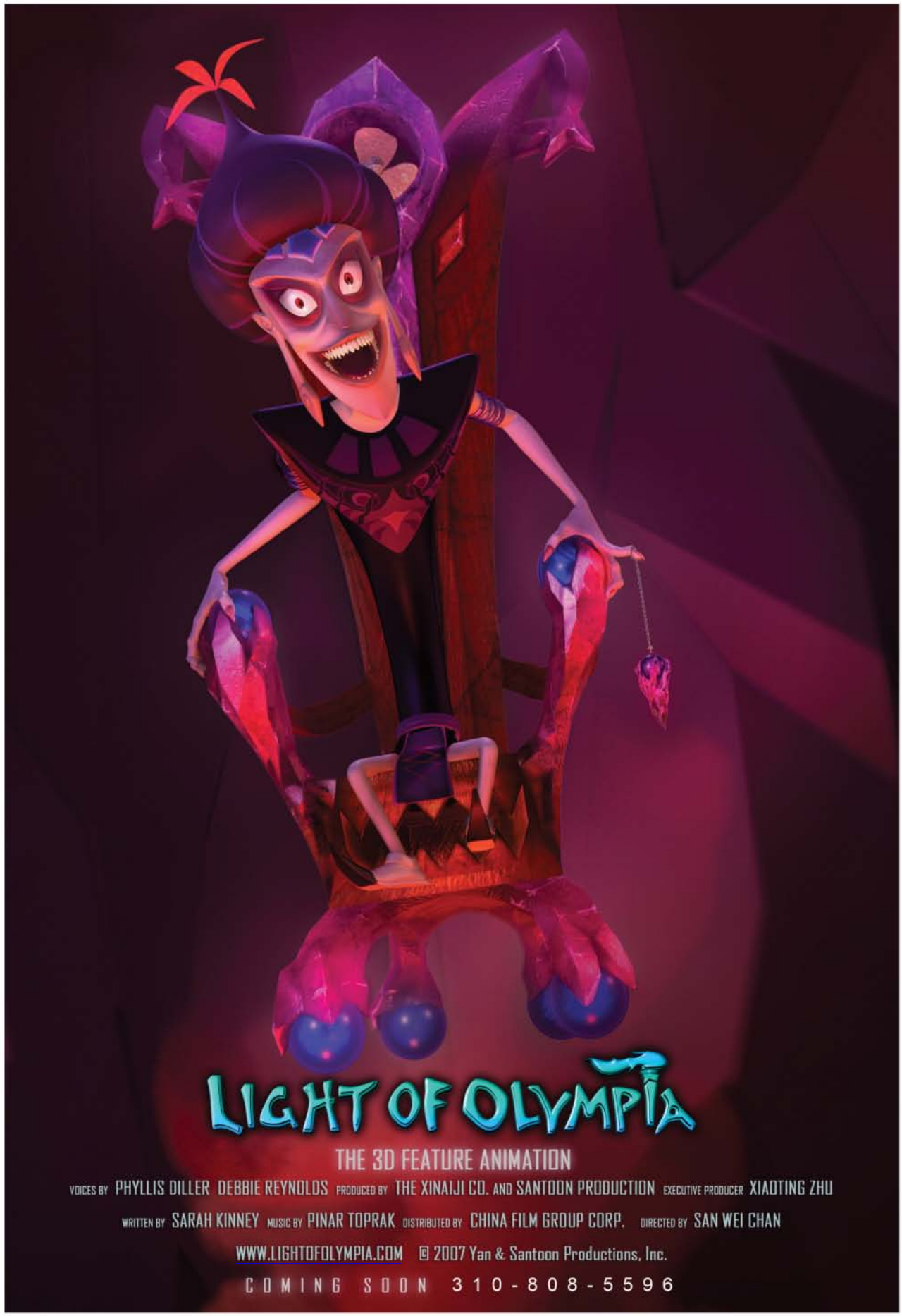
However, 3-D does give the filmmaker a powerful new storytelling tool that, if used well, can dramatically enhance the viewer's experience and level of engagement with your story. For example, the human interocular distance—the space between our eyes—is approximately 2.5 inches. If you want what's on screen to feel natural, use that distance.

But maybe you want the audience to feel small and scared. Make the interocular much smaller and you'll give the viewer an ant's POV, and what's on screen will feel enormous. If, on the other hand, you want the audience to feel big and powerful, spread the interocular out and they'll feel like a giant looking down on miniatures.

The potential of stereo 3-D hasn't been fully explored yet. And while it's a great new storytelling tool, it shouldn't be overdone. Lens flares became all the rage a few decades ago. We saw it used everywhere, and it was just awful. Don't use stereo as a gimmick. Use it intentionally and in moderation and it will further immerse your audience into your film ... not take them out of it instead! ■



Chris Harvey is visual effects supervisor at Frantic Films VFX Vancouver, a division of Prime Focus World. Find out more at www.franticfilms.com.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The Savannah College of Art and Design animation department offers a distinctive blend of classical and cutting-edge training — earning it a top-three ranking in North America by 3D World magazine.

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SCAD faculty members have extensive industry credentials. For example, legendary animator Gary Goldman served as a distinguished faculty member in 2007. He is best known for his work on animated classics "The Secret of N.I.M.H." (1982) and "All Dogs Go To Heaven" (1989), and the video games "Dragon's Lair" (1983) and "Space Ace" (1983). Animation professor Cheryl Cabrera (M.F.A., computer art, 2001) wrote the acclaimed resource book "An Essential Introduction to Maya Character Rigging."

Students enjoy incredible internships that also prepare them for professional careers. During Summer 2008, undergraduate animation student Leia (Bo) Mi is working with Walt Disney Imagineers and Holly Ewing is at Turner Studios. Graduate animation student Liam Kirtley is at the Emmy award-winning studio Saline Project, and Drew Lyon is interning as an animation design assistant at Starz Entertainment.

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- Stop-motion animator
- Demo artist
- Technical director
- Illustrator
- Instructor

SCAD alumni have earned these job titles at some impressive companies. John Doublestein (M.F.A., animation, 2007) is a creature assistant technical director at ILM/LucasFilms. Mark Therrell (B.F.A., computer art, 1995) is a character technical director at Pixar; his film credits include "Ratatouille" (2007) and "The Incredibles" (2004). Don (Chee Mun) Low was just hired by Walt Disney Imagineers following his participation in the 2008 Disney ImagiNations Design Competition.

Becki Tower, Wrentham, Mass., graduate student in animation, Once Uppon a Tyme Hippo and Monkey

I-Han Cheng, Tainan City, Taiwan, graduate student in broadcast design, *HomeSick*

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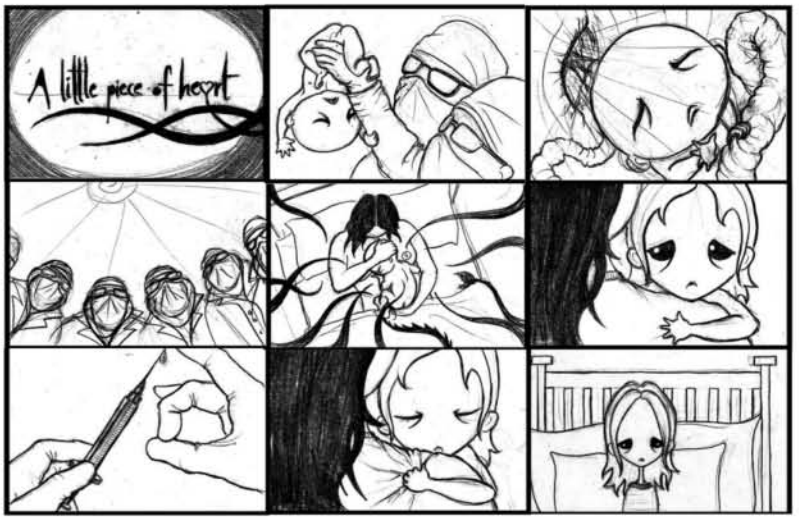

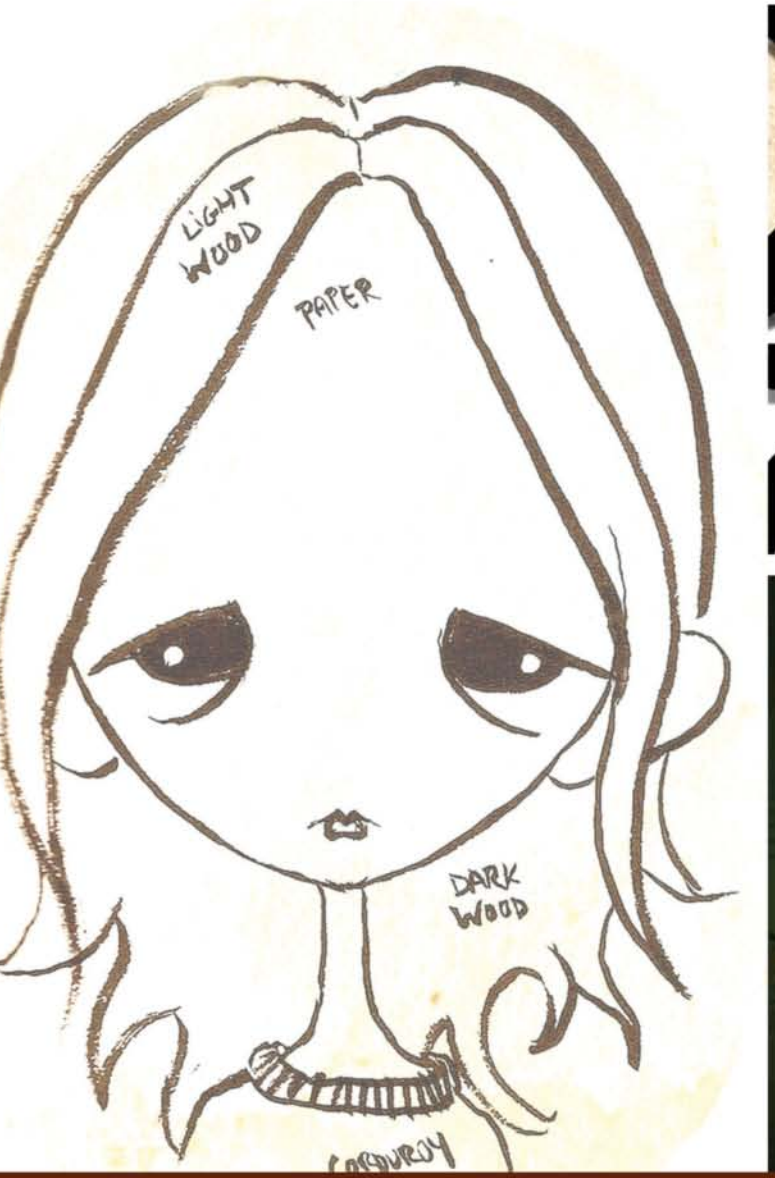

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Iron Man

The State of the VFX Art

A POV from ILM supervisor Marc Chu
by Ellen Wolff

This season's bumper crop of animated effects—in *Iron Man, The Hulk, Hancock, Hellboy II* and *The Dark Knight*—is doing more than stocking studio coffers. Those films' dazzling digital characters, sweeping CG camerawork and pixel-perfect integration with live-action footage are also enabling filmmakers to tell stories in ways they haven't been able to before. Working on the frontlines of these breakthroughs at ILM is Marc Chu, an animation supervisor whose latest work was beautifully displayed in *Iron Man*.

Chu has risen through the ranks at ILM in the 14 years since he arrived there as a 3D artist, working on *Men in Black*, the *Star Wars* prequels, *A.I.* and *Mission: Impossible*. He served as lead animator of the Davy Jones character in the second and third installments of *Pirates of the Caribbean* and in both 2007 and 2008 won the Visual Effects Society Award for Outstanding Animated Character in a Live Action Motion Picture.

"The benchmark today is photorealism," Chu asserts. "Audiences are more savvy about what we do, so expectations go up." *Iron Man*, in which CG had to mimic the practical effects done by Stan Winston, is a good example of today's "animated realism." In some shots, computer-animated weapons extended the character's metallic suit; in others, the suit was pure CG. Today's filmmakers, especially those like *Iron Man* director Jon Favreau who don't come from visual effects, want to be able to cut between animated and practical elements and not think twice. "They want to have the freedom to say 'Maybe that's not working practically' and they ask us to match that look." says Chu. "In the end, Jon couldn't even tell them apart."

Marc Chu

Chu credits modern software tools for enabling artists to achieve that degree of accuracy. "We have much better capabilities to make metal look realistic and react to lighting properly." It's notable that Pixar's RenderMan software, which turns 20 this year, has been used at ILM all that time with increasingly realistic results. In *Iron Man*, the stainless steel suit really looks like steel, and Chu says, "I think that software definitely got us there."

Also supporting photorealism are today's practices of gathering extensive High Dynamic Range Images on set, and amassing camera tracking and set information that allows digital artists to precisely insert CG elements into plate photography. Chu observes,

Pirates of the Caribbean: At World's End

Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince

> "We try, as much as possible, not to use green-screen because you have so many other challenges when you shoot that way … In recent years, we've found that shooting stuff 'dirty' has been beneficial. It may sound hard, but I think it pays off in the end because you get something that looks more realistic."
>
> **—ILM's vfx supervisor Marc Chu**

"Artists are so talented nowadays that we can take a plate and dissect it to 'reverse engineer' our characters into a shot."

What this means, increasingly, is a trend away from using green-screen photography, at least for ILM. Chu explains, "We try, as much as possible, not to use green-screen because you have so many other challenges when you shoot that way. You have to recreate an environment and pull a character off the green-screen and try and fit him into that environment. In recent years, we've found that shooting stuff 'dirty' has been beneficial. It may sound hard, but I think it pays off in the end because you get something that looks more realistic."

It also gives directors as much freedom as possible to shoot plates however they want.

Digital simulations of phenomena like water and fire are also on the rise. "We're doing more water effects than were even used in *Pirates*," says Chu. "And for *Iron Man*, we did explosions and destructions digitally with an in-house tool called Fracture. It allows us to blow things up as we would in reality. Of course we still use a combination of digital and practical elements. We use Kerner Optical (ILM's former in-house group) to shoot pyro effects and we fold them together into shots. The line between real and digital fire has become pretty hard to see.

"We're working on shows right now where we're doing digital fire that's some of the best I've seen in movies so far," adds Chu. "There are so many things aside from making it look realistic, however. You have to make it 'perform' and do what the director wants. And what director doesn't want to control the elements of the earth?"

After completing *Iron Man*, Chu moved on to supervise ILM's animation in *Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince*, which calls for yet another kind of realism. "There's always the drive to try and recreate reality, and we're pretty close to getting there. But I don't know if there will ever be a point where we say, 'Aaah, now we can rest!'" ■

Ellen Wolff is a Los Angeles-based journalist who specializes in visual effects, CG animation and education.

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Wrapped in China

Animating *The Mummy 3*'s terra cotta emperor was a make-or-break deal for the team at Digital Domain.

by Ron Magid

If it wasn't for animation supervisor Kelvin Lee, much of *The Mummy: Tomb of the Dragon Emperor*'s fantastic visual effects might not have translated—literally.

Lee was hired by Digital Domain, the shop responsible for the landmark effects seen in *Titanic, The Day After Tomorrow* and *Speed Racer*, to help beef up its character animation chops. For *The Mummy*'s third outing, he had his hands full. "It's the most complex film I've ever worked on," says Lee, whose credits include pre-viz animation for *Iron Man* and *Spider-Man 3*, and senior animator duties on *Monster House*.

As in the previous *Mummy* movies, the undead Emperor Mummy, encased in a sarcophagus shaped like a terra cotta warrior, speaks only his native tongue—in this case, Mandarin Chinese. Fortunately, martial artist turned actor Jet Li had a fine command of the language. How good? "A little bit better than me," Lee says. "But I could understand what he was talking about."

So was it a job prerequisite that this *Mummy*'s animation supervisor speak Chinese? "I don't think so," says Lee, who agrees that had things been different, the task would have been that much harder. "I think I should get more money!" he jokes.

Lee's occidental animation crew faced tremendous challenges animating in another language after Jet Li was filmed both on-set for plates and also via reference video to document facial expressions and movement. "You have no idea how many times we had to reanimate a line over and over again," Lee says. "The lines generally weren't that long so they weren't too complicated, which is good. I'd break them down phonetically so the animators could approximate what he was saying. We usually did as many as three or four passes on the facial animation to get it right."

Jet Li, Inside and Out

More challenging still was animating the Emperor Mummy's bulky terra cotta body over Li's performance. "The director [Rob Cohen] wanted to be sure that anyone could see through his facial and body performance that it was Jet Li," says Lee. "We set up three cameras—one for a front view, two on the sides."

Lee's task was to insure the martial artist moved with his typical grace despite the cumbersome terra cotta warrior façade. "It's a fine line. His attitude's stiff and arrogant as the villainous Emperor. Originally, Jet Li was just supposed to walk stiffly and without too much attitude, but I convinced Rob to have him try a more traditional Chinese opera performance, with both hands behind his back, which displays confidence, arrogance and attitude. We also animat-

ed more stiff poses for him rather than give him more fluid movement. We even made some changes to his poses if they looked less strong in the plate by changing his posture a little bit. Like a superhero, we wanted to make sure he didn't walk funny."

Forget walking: How were the animators supposed to make ancient pottery express emotion? "I was scratching my head the whole time, wondering how we were going to do that," Lee admits. "The hard clay material was never going to look stretchable, so the only way to get around it was having it crack and have pieces fall off when the Emperor made any expression. We roto'd on top of video reference of Jet Li's face, but we had to keep cranking up and exaggerating the initial performance to compensate for the stiffness of terra cotta. The effects team did a great job of doing all the cracking and making the dust look convincing, but sometimes after they put the dust on top of the animation, you couldn't read the expression anymore. So we were constantly making changes to make sure the facial animation worked with the effects on top. We passed it back and forth, amping it up more each time, so we didn't lose any of the performance."

Jet Li was not always available to portray the Emperor Mummy, however. "The animation was a combination of a lot of different people," says Lee, including the director and occasionally the animation supervisor himself. "The shot where he's on fire wasn't planned so when we added that in, I volunteered to do it myself and try to look like Jet Li. The first time [Rob] saw it he laughed, but it worked."

Signs of Aging

Ultimately, the Emperor's terra cotta face cracks away, completely revealing the blackened mummy underneath. "That is a shock; we want to scare people," Lee says. "We see Jet Li's features in the mummified face, and based on his performance we created extreme expressions that are so intense. It's definitely a lot scarier than before."

Unlike Imhotep, whose skull was covered with layers of articulating muscles and tendons, the Emperor's features are somewhat simpler. "He has a skull-like appearance but we wanted to visually recognize it was Jet Li, so his face was mainly animated via controls of clusters that deform to make different shapes and emotions. We didn't want to see a dead face, so the animation's really alive."

Of Digital Domain's 306 total vfx shots, a little less than half involved character animation—including battle sequences with armies of characters using Massive, motion capture and hand animation. The Emperor Mummy consists of only 36 shots, but they are all make-or-break moments. If the Emperor appears alive, then so does the whole movie. ■

"We roto'd on top of video reference of Jet Li's face, but we had to keep cranking up and exaggerating the initial performance to compensate for the stiffness of terra cotta."

—Animation supervisor Kelvin Lee

Universal's *The Mummy: Tomb of the Dragon Emperor* began its U.S. theatrical run on August 1.

The Truth Is Still Out There!

Mulder and Scully continue their search for paranormal events, but where are the aliens and the digital effects in the new *X-Files* movie? by Barbara Robertson

We all want to believe the movie has visual effects. It's *The X-files,* after all, with agents Fox Mulder (David Duchovny) and Dana Scully (Gillian Anderson) searching for the truth about their relationship and mysterious, possibly paranormal events. But, because this is the long-anticipated *The X-Files: I Want to Believe* movie, producer Frank Spotnitz and director Chris Carter kept the storyline wrapped as tight as an Egyptian mummy. Visual effects supervisor Mat Beck of Entity FX was especially cautious; he wanted to reveal the studio's work on the film's 400 effects shots in exquisite detail, but having worked as visual effects producer with Carter on 96 episodes of *The X-files* TV series, he knew the drill.

"We put people in places where they weren't really," he says.

Which places?

"Washington, DC," he finally admits. "And on water. We put people on water when they weren't and put them in a boat when they weren't there."

Which people?

"I have to be vague," he says.

What Beck could talk about in detail, though, was a new software application that David Alexander, CG supervisor at Entity FX, developed to place thousands of CG snowflakes in several hundred live-action shots filmed in British Columbia. Entity FX uses a pipeline based on Maya, with boujou for tracking, Maya, mental ray or RenderMan for rendering and After Effects and Discreet boxes for compositing. The snow software works within Maya.

"David rejected my superior suggestion to call the application 'Flakeazoid,'" Beck says. "So, we call it 'Frosty.'"

Frosty, which drives Maya's particle engine, gives artists the ability to control snowfall the size and intensity of a blizzard, or direct a gentle dusting of snow on a car hood. Alexander wrote the application in Mel, Maya's scripting language.

He describes the system succinctly: "It's a particle system generator that creates an emitter that uses sprites."

The sprites are snowflake images that the artists create using a fractal system to produce approximately 100 variations, each 500 x 500k resolution. Frosty scales the images appropri-

> "I can tell you that the flying saucer count was zero."
>
> **— Mat Beck, vfx supervisor, Entity FX**

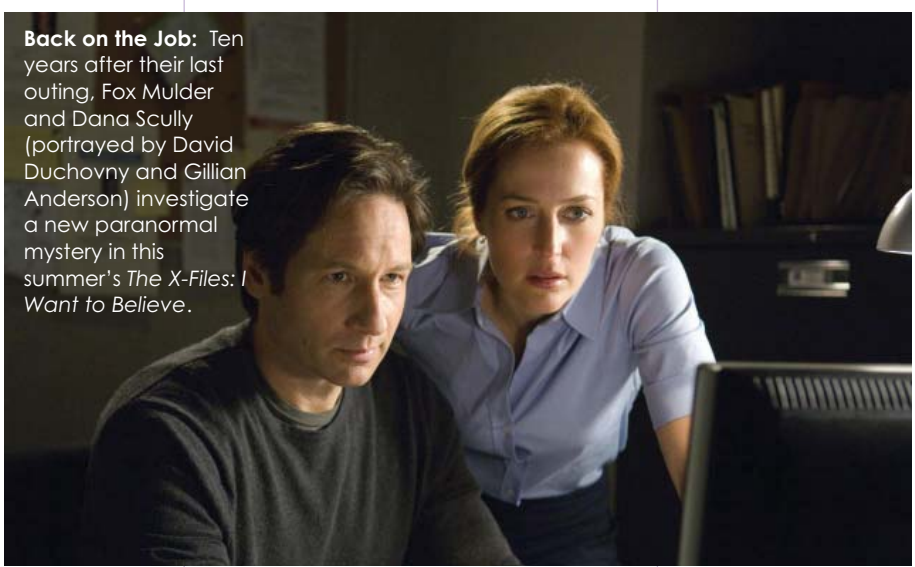
Snow Job: Entity FX developed a special software (Frosty) to create CG snowflakes in several hundred shots filmed in British Columbia. The software works within Maya.

ately to put, say, 10,000 in a frame.

Each image has a blurred sequence that ranges from completely sharp to completely out of focus. Thus, artists can assign and scale the flakes randomly, or create the illusion of depth of field based on distance with a ramp gradient. Black at one end of the gradient, for example, might represent "in focus" and white, "out of focus."

"We can attach a distance node to the camera and calculate where the focal point is," Alexander says, "and then, based on the ramp, Frosty will pick the right flakes to have the snowfall go progressively into focus."

Artists can also work with multiple Frosty systems at the same time, as many Frosties in a Maya scene as they want. "They can turn them on and off and blend between them," Alexander says. "The Frosties all talk to each other. So sometimes the artists create foregrounds, mid-grounds and backgrounds using many layers."



Back on the Job: Ten years after their last outing, Fox Mulder and Dana Scully (portrayed by David Duchovny and Gillian Anderson) investigate a new paranormal mystery in this summer's *The X-Files: I Want to Believe*.

Each particle in a Frosty has a turbulence value with a minimum and maximum frequency that artists can control specifically or randomly. The particles can also detect collisions. "Let's say you have several shots of snow falling on a car window," Alexander says. "Frosty can detect that and deflect the snow particles appropriately."

That helped artists add snow to a car crash shot, for example. In this sequence, the car is digital because it runs straight at the camera. "We CG'd it, rolled it at the camera and then had parts flapping around and broken glass that interacted with the snow," Beck says.

What kind of car?

Beck pauses for a beat and then says, "A Ford."

Once the artists were happy with the snowstorms they created, they could add mist. "They just click an icon and Frosty automatically creates the mist," Alexander says. "The mist has the same characteristics as the snow, but the sprites are images of clouds that Frosty scales accordingly. We had artists who had never touched a particle system before generating cool shots with mist and swirlies. They were pretty happy and excited."

Because the crew filmed in British Columbia in winter, the post-production crew often added snow for continuity. On some days during filming, it snowed. On other days, it was sunny with hard shadows and highlights. "In the more complex shots, we might see the shadows cast from the moving sun and the Sawtooth Mountains in the distance, which wasn't appropriate," Beck says. "We had to roto and track objects in the scene to add snow and a misty atmosphere and either cover or chop off the mountains."

For one sequence, however, they decided to remove snow from the live-action footage rather than add it. "We had 40 practical shots without snow and only 10 with snow," Beck says. "So, we thought it would be easier to take the snow out of 10 than add snow to 40. But, we didn't have any fancy software for de-snowing. It turned into the world's most horrendous dust-removal job with a lot of hand work."

What was happening in the sequence?

"It's a driving scene."

Who's driving?

"A principle character."

Frosty's ease of use also gave artists the ability to control the snow in unusual ways. "We had a gazillion shots where we added the snow," Beck says. "It was a fact of the weather, but we also used it to help affect the emotional impact of scenes. As things get dicier, the snow gets heavier. Because the artists could tweak the nature of the snow so well, we had the freedom to tune the emotional aspects."

What emotions?

"They're super concerned about revealing plot points," Beck says. "Just imagine a kind of adventure when you have someone behind a window in a car that's driving and it's snowing, blowing."

In addition to snowstorms and snow removal, Entity FX brought a practical dummy to life by using 2.5D deformations to open its eyes and animate its face. And, the studio created digital backgrounds to put environments outside the windows of cars filmed on green-screen stages and to put the characters into perilous situations.

For example, the studio extended a two-story construction site to eight stories by finishing buildings, adding streets and cars. "Ironically, because they filmed the sequence on a real site, they had this big-ass crane in the middle of it," Beck says. "So, I threw some cameras around my neck, climbed up the crane and shot reference from the right height."

In another shot, the crew replaced an actor's coat with a CG coat to make it look as if the wind was blowing.

Whose coat?

"Somebody's," Beck says. "We also made some things more gruesome and less gruesome and made digital blood and digital makeup. And we removed footprints and vehicle tracks from the snow. When you do a lot of shooting in the snow, take two becomes an adventure. So, anyway, that's the kind of stuff we did. We helped create the world of the story and give it some emotional tone."

What about flying saucers?

"I can tell you that the flying saucer count was zero," Beck says.

And aliens? Are there any aliens in the film?

"I wouldn't lie to you," he says. "I'm going to say 'No.'"

We choose to believe.

[Editor's note: If we told you anything more, they'd kill us or make our magazine disappear. Seriously.] ■

Barbara Robertson is an award-winning journalist who specializes in visual effects and CG technology. If you have any suggestions for her columns, you can e-mail her at barbararr@comcast.net.

Twentieth Century Fox's *The X-Files: I Want to Believe* is currently playing in theaters across the U.S.

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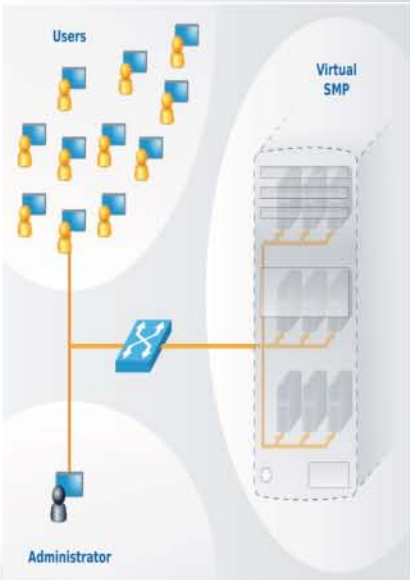

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The Art of Being Green

Professional mo-cap actor Terry Notary discusses the secrets of portraying both the Hulk and his adversary.

by Ron Magid

"Acting is having a free vehicle with which to express emotion. Emotion carries the word 'motion.' So when you move, you create emotion, and emotion creates movement."

The speaker is Terry Notary, one of the world's few professional performance-capture actors (along with the better known Andy Serkis, Ray Winstone and Tom Hanks, among others). It's an elite club, but Notary, who recently completed performing as both the Hulk and his nemesis, Abomination, is arguably the most dedicated practitioner of this new art.

His background is unique. After graduating from UCLA in 1991, Notary literally ran off to join the circus—the famed Cirque du Soleil, where his natural athletic prowess expressed itself in the gymnastically challenging center ring. "That's really where I learned to be a performer," says Notary, who left the big top after five years to pursue a career in photography.

Then destiny called: Director Ron Howard wanted Cirque du Soleil acrobats to play Whos in *The Grinch*. Notary immediately sensed a serious problem: Everyone was moving the way *they* thought a Who should move. The solution: Who School. After training all the Whos down in Whoville, Notary was responsible for ensuring that the denizens of *Tim Burton's Planet of the Apes*—some 500 stuntmen and actors—behaved like real simians, and even convinced the director to let them run on all fours. Soon he was helping Alan Cumming with Nightcrawler's movements for *X-Men 2*, figuring the best body language for Brandon Routh's flying Superman and enabling Doug Jones to find the Silver Surfer's perfect wave.

But Notary's biggest performance-capture challenge was portraying both the nine-foot-tall Hulk and his adversary, the 12-foot-tall Abomination. To define the characters, especially during their epic fight scenes, Notary gave them each distinct and polar opposite movements: "Hulk's energy source comes from behind, like he's being pushed. For Abomination, I harnessed bungee cords to my chest, so I was always fighting against this natural tension when he walked. When the Hulk punches Abomination, he snaps back against the Hulk's energy like a Mac truck hit head on, whereas when the Hulk gets hit he internalizes the energy, then rolls out of it on a four-count."

Terry Notary

That time signature provided the key to differentiating the characters: "It was a neat way to create subtle differences in the motion-capture performance, something you feel rather than explain. I tried to keep the Hulk's movements on a four-count—like music or the four seasons, that's what feels natural to us—so they had a sense of completion. For Abomination, I wanted to create a sense of hate, so he has this oblong, five-count rhythm that leaves you hanging to convey a character that's incomplete and full of tension."

Interestingly, the struggle between the Hulk and Abomination charac-

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Hulk

continued from page 60

ters—between heart and head, feeling and thinking—is exactly the challenge Notary feels actors face, especially as they become removed from their physical bodies and begin inhabiting digital characters: "It's about finding a balance between the mind and the body and letting them work together, not shutting one off so the other can do its thing. Mentally, the Hulk is a feeling character—he feels with his body and that feeling turns into thought. With the Abomination, the head is the leader. That's what it's all about—whose heart is bigger; and it's ultimately the Hulk. All the cunning, strategy and planning is not going to outweigh a man's heart."

But no matter how much Notary's emotions inform the movements he imparts to his performance, he's ultimately dependent on the animators, who impose their own choices on the characters. "I wish I had more control on that, but the animators have the final say," says Notary, who hopes someday that performance-capture artists will work alongside animators to achieve that perfect symbiosis of performer and digital character. "It's so important, especially with motion capture, which is all about the subtleties. When I'm conveying the character's sorrow or suspense or confusion, motion capture actually reads those feelings. But after I'm done working closely with the visual effects supervisor, who's there for every shot, I'll tell the animators how I think the character should move and then it's pretty much, 'See ya.' It's like I select the ingredients for a meal, then hand it over to the animators and it's how they prepare it that's ultimately what you get." ■

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Tech Reviews

by Todd Sheridan Perry

Luxology's modo 302

Sometimes I get the feeling that I'm constantly writing reviews of modo. But that's because the talented team at Luxology keeps coming up with new versions of their popular tool. Luxology really gets under the hood and tinkers around to make it faster and add in whole new features. So many little tweaks have been implemented in the new 302 version that I can't cover them all here, but I'll hit the big ones.

Surprisingly, the number of new tools for the modeling component of modo is small, considering that the tool started out as strictly a modeling package. That being said, these tools are quite powerful. The Flex, for example, combines transformation tools on selected vertices along with soft selection spinners, so that you can make modeling adjustments to sub-selections without jumping back and forth between different tools. Compounded with this, modo has a way to quickly reposition the pivot point of your selection to the borders of the selection, so that rotations during modeling can quickly be accomplished around different pivots without repositioning the object's center. Other tools include new edge controls like Join Edge, Join Edge Average and Split Edge.

The modo team has put in a few more animation enhancements. Modo was originally focused on being a modeler, but they have been incrementally pushing it into a more general-purpose 3D program. The graph/track editor has been expanded to include copy/paste functions for animation curves which allow for more advanced editing like ripple edits. Weighted vertex animation has also been included, meaning that individual verts can be affected or explicitly animated to give nice secondary animation such as skin jiggles or high-frequency vibration.

The largest list of new features in modo is in the renderer, which helps generate new levels of realism. Physical sun and sky have been added to the program, plus the ability to place your scene in a location on the earth based on longitude and latitude, and by simply adding time of day, the sun and sky will light accordingly. This will prove very helpful for architectural renderings. There are new controls for color saturation and global illumination. Most impressive of all is that you can render out discrete render buffers, which really is a more advanced level of production akin to renderers like V-Ray—or mental ray and PRMan—if you have a support team backing you up. I look forward to the next iteration of modo ... which will probably be tomorrow!

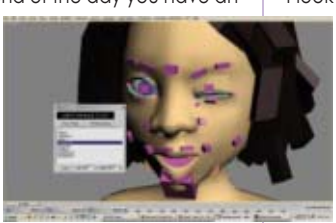
Website: www.luxology.com

Price: $895; $945 (floating license); $395 (upgrade)

Softimage CAT 3.0

As a digital artist and frequent animator, I'm always keeping my eyes open for tools to make my job easier. CAT (Character Animation Tools) 3.0 is one of those that I'm really impressed with. I'm a little confused by its origins. It's developed by Softimage—definitely the leader in character animation since the inception of CG characters, and one that other programs should take a cue from—however, it's a plug-in for 3ds Max. Does this mean than the features are already built into XSI? I'm not an XSI character animator, so I can't say *for sure*—but it would make sense.

If you take a typical 3ds Max character animator who works with Biped and hand over CAT to him, it would be like giving a coffee drinker a 64 oz. can of Rockstar. Suddenly, productivity goes up and at the end of the day you have an army of lizard kings fighting a gaggle of tortoise-shelled insects. It's really that easy. I exaggerate, of course, but not by much!



The crux of this small, yet powerful, program is the procedural aspect of not only the rigging, but also the way these rigs move. Walks and runs of all types come packaged with the program, and they are easily adjusted. They auto adjust to the proportions, or sometimes even to the number of limbs of the characters. You can attach the character to a dummy node and the character locks its footsteps—even over rough terrain. This is great for crowds where you have set up animated nodes for the agents.

But the power doesn't stop there. The CAT system is a layers animation system, so you can keyframe on top of the procedural animation and blend seamlessly between the two.

If you have complex characters needing complex rigs—spiders, horses, centipedes, cats and, yes, even humans, CAT's presets are really a solid launch point. Sometimes I just don't have time to really use a product in production, but in the case of CAT, I needed to rig and animate a spider in three days. If I had to do it by hand, I'd still be animating.

This is inexpensive, powerful and pretty straightforward. If you want to have the right tools for character animation and feel more comfortable in Max than in XSI, I would really recommend this product—honest and true—and how often can you recommend something without any reservations?

Website: www.softimage.com/products/cat

Price: $995 (commercial license); $259 (upgrade); $195 (student/faculty); $60 (student/faculty upgrade)

B&G Designs' Movie Forms Pro

Sometimes the really important stuff in life doesn't necessarily come in the coolest packages. Paying your car insurance, putting money into your 401K or watching *American Idol*. So, in the same vein, not all of the software I look at is glitzy and exciting—but, they are important. Such is the case with a recent CD called *Movie Forms Pro* from B&G Designs, a company which has been providing software to the film and tape industry since 1985.

Anyone who has ever tried to put together a film, or even just worked in the office on the production side, knows how much paperwork is behind all the creative stuff. Without the standardization and organization, nothing would ever get done, much less in an efficient way. It would be terrific if this mountain of standard forms and templates could be found

in one, easy-to-find place. That's really what this CD is all about—making it efficient to access the paperwork that will allow the film process to run smoothly.

The CD provides a wide variety of different forms. For actual production, you have call sheets, slate templates, casting information, costume sizes, sound reports, contact sheets and more. For the business side, in the production office, you have tax forms, talent releases, petty cash expense reports, contractor agreements and much more. They even provide templates for storyboards in three different layouts and another for 1.85 aspect ratio. Post-production forms are also there for tape logs, cue sheets, time sheets and so forth. Beyond the business forms, you can also find signs for the actual production, like signs for the different departments, for the office doors (Director, Editorial, Producer); warnings (Crew Only, Quiet Filming in Progress, Closed Set, No Parking) and more.

Movie Forms Pro is offered as both interactive and traditional. The traditional version comes with forms that you simply print out, and then fill in the appropriate information, whereas Interactive provides the forms in the PDF file format that allows the data to be input electronically and printed out if necessary. Both are available from the website, the difference being that Interactive can be immediately downloaded, while the traditional version will be shipped to you on a CD. Yes, I realize that this isn't as sexy as 3D software or a Wacom tablet, but believe me when I tell you that these commonplace items are absolutely essential if you plan to get into filmmaking.

Website: www.movieforms.com
Price: Movie Forms Pro Interactive: $149; Movie Forms Pro Regular: $49

Four Great Course Technology Handbooks for Your Library

The Official Luxology modo 301 Guide

By Daniel Ablan
[Course Technology, $49.99]

What good would modo be if you didn't know how to use it? Fortunately, our friends at Course Technology and longtime visual effects guy Daniel Ablan have come up with a nice handbook to get the novice users started. Back in the '90s, Ablan was known as Dr. Toaster (that's when LightWave and Video Toaster were as popular as Bill Clinton and Nirvana), but it looks like he migrated to modo with the release of the first *Guide* in '06 and has now conveniently updated it.

Ablan quickly lets you dive headfirst into the pool after a brief description of where the deep end, the ladder and the life preservers are located. His writing style is friendly, down to earth and unpretentious. But what drew me to the book most is that Ablan doesn't simply say "Do this, and then this and then this and put in this value, blah, blah, blah." He actually takes the time to explain *why* you are doing it. This is invaluable information not just when using modo, but for any 3D program you may encounter. That's the beauty of working with these tools—the buttons may be in different places, but the theories remain the same.

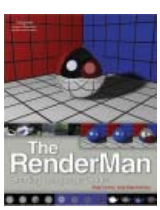
The book is also packed with additional information such as helpful websites and forums as well as appendices of reflection and refraction indices.

On a final note, Ablan has some opinions on the theories, the pipeline, the industry and the way things work. This happens when we CG guys have been in the business for a while and our eyes don't sparkle as brightly as they did in the early years. So I can definitely relate to him on that level. Those who take the time to read the parts of the book that go beyond the how-to may actually earn some added insight into this world that we love and hate at the same time.

The RenderMan Shading Language Guide

By "Don" Rudy Cortes and Saty Raghavachary
[Course Technology, 49.99]

There are few CG artists who aren't familiar with RenderMan. The original guys—let's call them the founding fathers of CG—contributed to this renderer, and they made sure that it would be something accessible to everyone in terms of design. They knew that they didn't have the answer to everything, and instead of creating a closed system, they developed a language so that people could come up with the answers to previously unknown questions and make the render engine even more powerful.



I've followed the evolution of this tool since I first bought a copy of *The RenderMan Companion* in 1993. To be honest, it overwhelmed me. It was a little too advanced for me at the time. It assumed that I knew a lot more than I actually did. I got a lot of the concepts, but it never gave me the confidence to leap into the sea of shader development. Years later, when I was more experienced and had a few shows under my belt, I went back to it—along with the *Advanced RenderMan Companion*. Still, I wasn't totally jiving with this updated book.

Recently, I went through *The RenderMan Shading Language Guide*—again, provided by the good people at Course Technology—and everything became clear. It was an epiphany, just like the old days in high school calculus when a theory wasn't making sense and, suddenly, the clouds parted and you became enlightened. (Colors were more saturated. Babies were more beautiful. Well, you know the drill.)

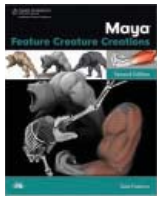
The authors, "Don" Rudy Cortes and Saty Raghavachary, walk you through the world of RenderMan in a way that makes it oh-so-much-more approachable. They start with an intro to RLS, go through the shader writing process and how to set up a proper shader developing environment. Then they go through raytracing, global illumination, pattern anti-aliasing and DSO shadeops. Overall, they come across as your buddies with whom you're sitting around discussing this stuff over a beer rather than being lectured to in an auditorium while expecting to have a test at the end of the semester.

I would highly recommend the book to those wanting to get into RenderMan Shader development—or even those who are already in it and want to learn more. In fact, I passed it over to a programmer buddy of mine who has been doing this stuff forever, and he attempted to steal it from me. Apparently, he agrees with me that these 672 pages are invaluable indeed.

Maya: Feature Creature Creations

By Todd Palamar
[Course Technology, $49.99]

Continuing our Course Technology marathon review session, we now move on to Todd Palamar's Maya handbook. Interestingly enough, the author was rejected from CalArts many years ago, but he jumped into the industry and used the experience of making films as his college education. You really have to admire



that (without actually dis-

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Digital Magic

by Christopher Grove

Catching up with Odd Todd, China Chic and Ribbit

No More Slacking for Odd Todd

Odd Todd has found a job! **Z Animation**, the TV spot animation company founded by exec producer Peter Barg, has announced the signing of Internet Flash cartoonist and animator Odd Todd for exclusive national spot representation. The perpetually unemployed, ex-dotcom slacker has built a growing franchise and slightly fanatical fan base since his first downloadable short, *Laid Off: A Day in the Life*, debuted in 2002 on his website, oddtodd.com.

Since then, Odd Todd (a.k.a. Todd Rosenberg of Brooklyn, New York) has developed a following for the Odd Todd shorts, which Rosenberg creates, writes, draws, animates and narrates. The unemployed Odd Todd character spends much of the day shuffling around his apartment in a bathrobe, drinking coffee and eating Fudge Stripe cookies. During breaks from TV, video games or naps, he stumbles on simplistic core realizations—"Mon-ay is kinda important and stuff"—and how finding the right woman is hard when you are overweight, balding and unemployed.

"The visual style is strikingly simple. The character crosses cultural boundaries and speaks to an everyman demographic," says Z Animation's Barg. "He talks in a familiar tone about everyday issues, affordable products and money and credit problems. In addition, Flash animation is inexpensive, dominates the Internet and is the cornerstone deliverable of Adobe's technology, making it ideal for airing across multiple platforms."

Oddtodd.com attracts a demographic of 18- to 34-year-olds who perceive this character as heroic, because of his stubborn refusal to give into a corporate job and follow a traditional path. In long form, meanwhile, a live-action movie is in development. Rosenberg also recently completed writing a Todd-esque sitcom pilot for CBS. Rosenberg produced *It's All About Carbon*, a five-part animated series about global warming for the National Geographic Channel, and he is a contributor to NPR's *All Things Considered*. Hmmm, all those gigs can really damage your slacker cred, dude.
[Website: www.oddtodd.com]

That New Chinese Flavor

Fly into Beijing, Shanghai or Guangzhou in the People's Republic of China these days and you'll be excused if you find yourself feeling a little confused. The opulent and ultra sleek airport terminals with their high-end retail and restaurants can easily make one puzzle: This is a Communist dictatorship? Which happens to be the focus, more or less, of Ted Koppel's four-part Discovery Channel documentary ***The People's Republic of Capitalism***. To establish a dissonant tone from the outset, producers hired design and production company **Imaginary Forces** to create the main title sequence.

Spearheaded by creative director Karin Fong, *The People's Republic of Capitalism* is the sixth show IF has done for *Koppel on Discovery*. In this case, the title sequence begins almost deceptively. It seems initially that we're in for a fairly straightforward montage of close-ups of China's paper RMB currency and the commonly used image of a middle-aged Mao Tse-tung beneficently watching over his people.

But almost immediately there's a figurative explosion of layers of China chic: Lush, intricate and colorful engravings, inspired by Chinese money but tweaked with symbols of present-day industry, fashion and culture. For its part, the program shatters stereotypes about China, dismissing the old-fashioned idea of a dull drab Communism and showing modern China as the "Wild, Wild East."

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Digital Magic

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An engine of economic growth moving at break-neck speed. "We brought the results of nearly a year of research, reporting and production on our China project to Karin and [her] team," says Peter Demchuk, a producer for *Koppel on Discovery*. "And we offered a title we hoped would capture a sense of the transformation and contradiction we discovered there. Karin came up with 45-seconds of visual poetry that sums up [the series] perfectly."
[Website: www.imaginaryforces.com]

Ribbit Knows Green Screen

Almost since the beginning of the film industry there has been a stock footage business, comprised of companies that sell background and establishing shots which producers can buy instead of spending time and more money to shoot themselves. The same is true for graphics, graphic backgrounds and other production elements. These banks of pre-made images are a cost effective way for even small market TV stations to give their on-air presence a polish that once was only the province of the big players in New York, Los Angeles, Dallas and others.

So it only makes sense that someone would eventually do the same for green-screen elements. In fact, more and more creatives—designers, directors, editors and producers alike—are looking to smaller companies such as New York-based **Ribbit Films**, a leading provider of pre-keyed HD stock footage. Ribbit offer clips that can be downloaded and used immediately in a pre-packaged format that's convenient, cost-effective and ready to use. The stock versions enable a designer to manipulate the footage into whatever scene they want. From its uses in commercials, films and online, pre-keyed footage is rapidly changing the way the industry works. All a designer has to do is search for the action they want to add to their script, download the clip to their computer and add the action to their existing clip. "We've seen the industry really grow and shift into a fast-paced business rather quickly," says Navarre Joseph, president of Ribbit Films. "Today, we're working as quickly as possible to collect great footage that we can prepare for immediate use."
[Website: www.ribbitfilms.com] ■

Chris Grove is a Los Angeles-based journalist and writer. If you have hot tips for his future columns, you can email him at cwjg@earthlink.net.

Tech Reviews

continued from page 65

suading kids from getting a college education). The book gives you an insight into the mind of an artist and devout filmmaker and film lover who had to come up with his own solutions because it all happened before CG had really taken off—and there where no hard-and-fast rules.

Palamar doesn't take the approach of lecturing readers on the different tools of Maya. In fact, he stays out of that realm for quite a while. Instead, he gets into biology and anatomy, or explains how the design of your creature should start as drawings, then as sculptures (complete with armatures). You might think, "Hey this is a book on how to do stuff in the computer! What the heck is he going on about? I'm on Chapter 3 and I still haven't opened the program." Well—I happen to agree with this approach. (How many times have we worked with lighting technical directors who have never picked up a physical camera, set up lights on a physical object and processed film and prints?)

When Palamar does get into the software, he touches on numerous topics—modeling, texturing, rigging—and even much more advanced rigging techniques like setting up muscle systems, and skinning using nCloth to get the skin to slide on top of the muscles. Furthermore, he occasionally pulls you out of Maya again and references other software, knowing that the book's subject isn't the end-all be-all solution for everything CG. Again, I agree. Use the screwdriver to screw in the screw, not the claw of a hammer.

The book is deceptively thin. At around 300 pages, the material is dense with information. I'm going to go back through and spend some time with this one—and I've been doing this kind of work for over a decade. You can never stop learning. Being a digital artist is like being a shark: You stop moving forward and you die.

ShaderX6: Advanced Rendering Techniques

By Wolfgang Engel
[Course Technology, $59.99]

Among the primers I'm covering this month, this ShaderX6 rendering handbook is by far the most involved and clearly written for a specific niche audience. I had flashbacks to college when I received the material. It's thick, hardcover and it even smells like a textbook. The nostalgia was overwhelming.

I flipped through the book to get an idea of what I was looking at, and realized very quickly that this is serious. This isn't "Intro to Sub-D Modeling." It isn't "How to Make a Faerie in Poser." This is "Check Out the Big Brain on Brad" world.

First of all, *ShaderX* is a series of books edited by a gent named Wolfgang Engel that has been around for the past six years or so. The series focuses on realtime rendering—meaning that you are making calculations with the GPU in the computer and displaying on the screen in real time, mainly through DirectX (if I'm not entirely mistaken).

In this latest iteration, Engel has taken the contributions of 40 programmers and compiled the latest techniques for making pretty pictures that render instantaneously. Anything you happen to see in *Grand Theft Auto 4* or *Assassin's Creed*? You can thank people like these guys for it. And if you want to *be* one of these guys, the book is a valuable asset. But at this stage ShaderX6 is to the point where you are going to need some physics, calculus and trig to really benefit from it. Actually, make that *a lot*.

I found the material to be fascinating in an academic way. I'm not a programmer, nor do I aspire to be one necessarily, but I could definitely follow along and it revealed a lot about how things are working under the hood—even though I don't plan to change my own fuel injectors anytime soon!

Website: http://course.cengage.com ■

Todd Sheridan Perry is the co-owner and vfx supervisor of Max Ink Productions. He can be reached at ducky@maxinkcafe.com.

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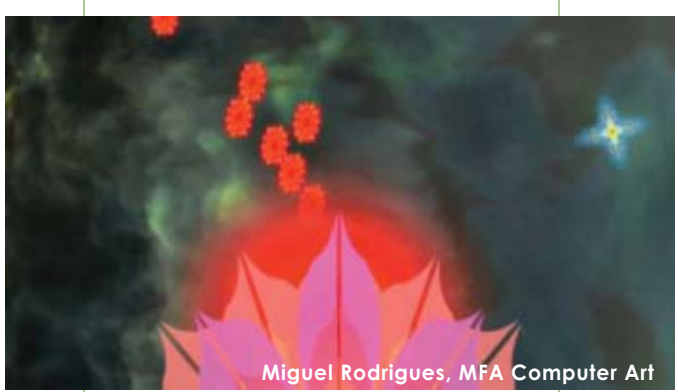
Getting Seen in the Big Apple

School of Visual Arts students get animated at Tribeca

by Ellen Wolff

Imagine yourself as a college sophomore, sitting in the audience at New York City's Tribeca Film Festival, the annual event famously co-founded by Oscar-winning actor Robert DeNiro. As the pre-show rolls, an animated Tribeca logo plays on the big screen … and it's yours. That's what happened this spring when over three dozen animated clips from New York's School of Visual Arts played during 700 festival screenings. Given the fact that Tribeca attracts an international audience to watch films from 41 countries, the SVA students got unprecedented exposure. Festival organizers report that nearly 400,000 people attended this year.

The students used approaches that ranged from traditional pen-and-ink stylings to visual effects-inflected graphics, and they represented three SVA degree programs: Bachelor of Fine Arts in Computer Art, Animation and Special Effects; Master of Fine Arts in Computer Art; and Bachelor of Fine Arts in Film, Video and Animation. "There wasn't a single style," observes John McIntosh, chair of the BFA Computer Art Program. "Diversity was the strength."


Miguel Rodrigues, MFA Computer Art

McIntosh asserts, "We scour the Internet for every festival to get our students' work published." But this was no ordinary opportunity, according to Sam Modenstein, SVA's exec director of external relations. "I'm always considering how to promote our students and graduates to groups outside of the campus—especially with industries that are involved with our majors. We do a lot of things with the 'usuals' like Comic-Con and SIGGRAPH. But it made sense to go to Tribeca because we're both New York-based and both strong supporters of independent filmmaking. So we thought we'd see if we could partner up somehow. I think that working with a college on their pre-show was something new for them."

John McIntosh

Sam Modenstein

The students were given free rein to play with the festival's official logo and create 10- to 30-second animated projects. McIntosh recalls, "The requirements for the Tribeca project weren't that specific, so the students wound up defining it for themselves. But the turnaround time was very fast. They had to execute this in under a month. We put the idea forward in our classes and opened it up to everybody. The majority of submissions came from our freshman and sophomore years, so many of the students were very young."

"When we first got the students' work for Tribeca," notes Modenstein, "We had to present it for approval to the co-executive director of the festival to ensure it met their requirements for quality. It was a thrill that our students were creating work that was on par with what they were looking for. Tribeca chose a nice variety. There were different forms of animation, including motion graphics and both 2D and 3D animation. And we could put our little SVA logo on the bottom of each one."

Modenstein credits SVA's head of career development, Jennifer Phillips, with fostering this opportunity. "She re-

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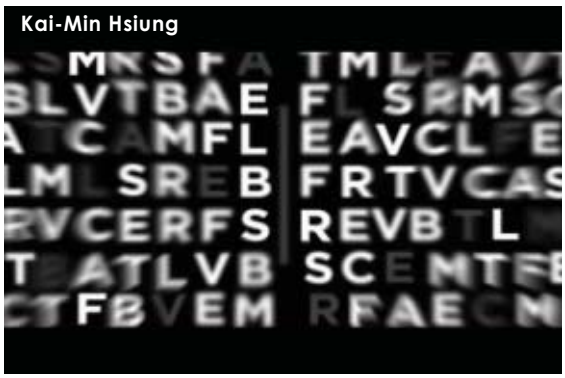

ally jumped in and pursued the partnership with Tribeca. This whole thing was pulled together in a matter of weeks." SVA views partnerships like this as a key strategy to get its students internships, freelance jobs and, ultimately, career opportunities. "Think about how many people saw SVA's animation at the festival and might be interested in following up with our students. This was a great way to give our students exposure with working professionals who are doing a variety of things."

McIntosh observes that it's become easier to get student work more widely seen now that it's no longer necessary to submit animation on film or tape. "This is the first year we're tape-free. We submitted animation to Tribeca as digital files. This makes things so much faster and less cumbersome." He notes that SVA supports submissions of student work to festivals by helping with paperwork and paying submission fees. "We probably submitted 20 graduating seniors' work to over 20 festivals. Most of these festivals are not prohibitive in terms of the cost of submission, so we don't have any budget limitations. It's more a matter of finding the right fit."

The results of the school's proactive stance were seen this year not only at Tribeca. SVA's Tatchapon Lertwirojkul's film *Simulacra* won the Silver Medal in Animation at this year's Student Academy Awards, while Hyun Jeen Lee's *Fish* was an Academy finalist in the Alternative category.

The exposure of student work from the School of Visual Arts is likely to rise when renovation is completed on a new building in Manhattan that will contain 500-seat and 200-seat theaters. It will provide a permanent venue for the school to host free screenings of student work that will be open to the public. "There's nothing else like it," says McIntosh. "It speaks to the growth of SVA and the reach it will have in the community."

Meanwhile, Modenstein continues to search for untapped outlets to show off the talents at SVA. "We recently had a booth at Art Basel in Miami. As far as I know, we're the first college to have gotten into a professional art fair like that. So we're always looking for opportunities." As for Tribeca, she adds, "We're already talking to them about next year!" ■

Ellen Wolff is a Los Angeles-based journalist who specializes in visual effects, CG animation and education.

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Class Acts: 2008 Annual Student Reel Awards

Just when you think you've seen every possible variation on the animated student project, a few sneak through that re-invent the possibilities of the format, dazzle you with some beautiful character designs or knock your socks off with storylines that inspire and amuse you beyond words. As long as schools keep cultivating students like these, there's no fear of huge media congloms and greedy studio bean-counters taking over our favorite art form.

First Place: *Dear Fatty*
By Hsin-I Tseng (USC)

A young girl sends a letter to her lost pet hamster in this amazingly effective seven-minute short by the gifted USC grad Tseng. Did we fall under the spell of this charming project because of its gorgeous visual design? Was it the expert mix of cut-out and stop-motion animation? Was it the sad voice of the girl reading the letter to her beloved hamster? Was it because we felt we had stepped into a magical, child-like universe reminiscent of Miyazaki's masterpieces? All of the above—and let's not forget the cool frogs our hamster meets on a train, who have an uncanny ability to puff up their throats and float into the crystal-blue sky. We're just hoping a smart animation studio will let Tseng direct her own feature project, *pronto*!

Second Place: *Damned Cute*
By Matt Nealon (CalArts)

You may think you've discovered a long-lost *Looney Tunes* classic as you take in this hilarious traditionally animated short about a cute little rabbit who triumphs over the increasingly irritated Dark Lord, Satan. The character design is very elegant and stylized, but it's the keen sense of humor and the precise comic timing which are true throwbacks to the best of Bugs Bunny and Elmer Fudd. Luckily, the talented animator has put up his short on youtube, so you can check it out yourself. And according to his blog, he's already been snapped up by DreamWorks Animation. Excellent move, Mr. Katzenberg! This one's a real keeper.

Third Place: *Dinosaur Song*
By Christian Robinson (CalArts)

Based on a poem by Daria Tessler, Christian Robinson has created a wonderful, moody piece about the popular Jurassic era reptile which charts millions of years in less than three minutes. On his blog, he mentions that he considers Yuri Norstein a big influence, and it's clear to see why. The project truly jumps out of the screen with the sophisticated way it mixes different methods and materials, including paper cut-outs. The hop-along music by Clinton Patterson also helps create just the right mood. "I love making things," writes Robinson. "Simplicity is my friend. Love and happiness are my goals." This talented young man is certainly on the right track.

Honor Roll

Last Duel of a Lost Era
By Hilary Lile (CalArts)

Umbrella
By Philip Vose (CalArts)

Buji
By Francisco Moncayo (Vancouver Film School)

The Gloaming
By Andrew Huang (USC)

Energetic KOKORO
By Tomoko Tuji (Nihon Kogakuin College)

Treasure
By Melissa Bouwman (USC)

Pajama Gladiator
By Glenn Harmon (Brigham Young University)

Out to Play
By Jessica Lozano (Ringling College of Art and Design)

Paranormal Room Mates
By Benton Connor (CalArts)

The Early Bird Catches the Worm
By John Joyce (CalArts)

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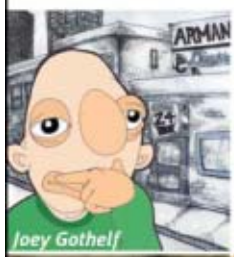

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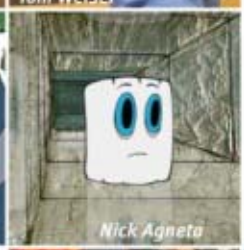

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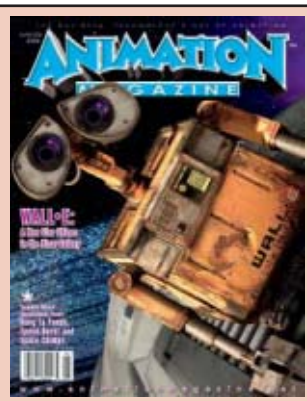

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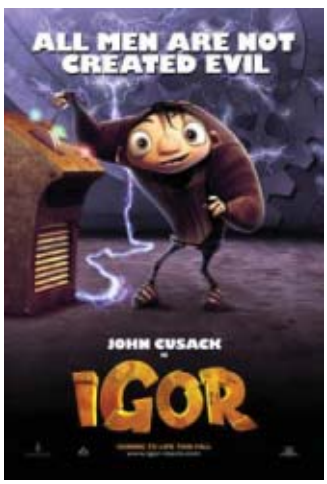

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11:00 a.m. "And if I draw a nose on this it becomes a puppy!"

2:00 p.m. Scott toils away waiting for the call from Fabio's modeling agency.

9:30 a.m. "Good morning!!!" says the always cheerful Raena.

11:45 a.m. The ghost of George Burns pays a visit to the studio on a regular basis.

2:30 p.m. "If I cut the wrong wire, this whole place is going to BLOW!"

10:00 a.m. Hrm...coffee first, or popcorn?

12:00 p.m. "Good afternoon!!!"

3:15 p.m John proudly shows off his newborn son: Benjamin "Keyboard" Scheer.

4:00 p.m. Tom and Evon tempt fate by watching *The Ring* video for the 700th time.

10:30 a.m. "Are you there, God? It's me, Margaret. *Shoot!* I mean John. *John!*"

12:30 p.m. Terry is finally on his game after eight coffees. But you'd never be able to tell...

5:00 p.m. With happy hour around the corner Wolf says, "Yellow *doesn't* mean slow down!"

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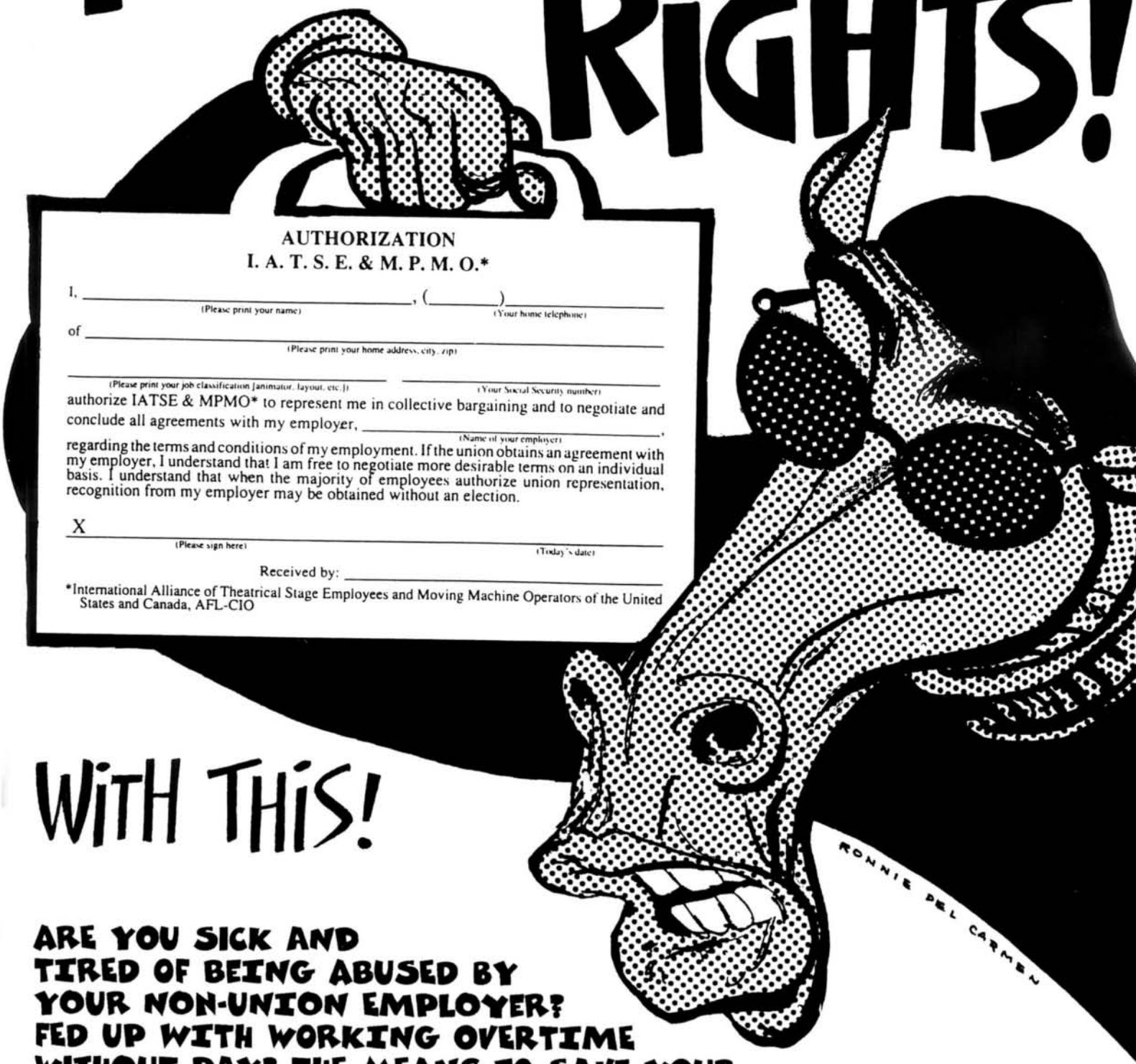

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RONNIE DEL CARMEN

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Why am I passionate about my pen?

I don't have just one. I have a bunch. And that's because I love them.

I'm Brittinie, an Animator. And for so long, I was in a rut: sketching… scanning… sketching. I didn't know any better.

One day, I had the chance to try a Cintiq 21UX. At that moment, I realized that I could move to a totally digital workflow, using the pen directly on screen to sketch, ink and color my scenes.

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